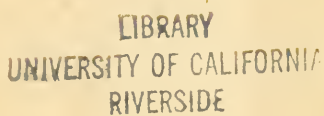


LOVE AND QUIET LIFE





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“LOVE AND QUIET LIFE”

“LOVE AND QUIET LIFE”

Somerset Idylls

BY

WALTER RAYMOND

*Author of “Gentleman Upcott’s Daughter” “Young Sam and
Sabina” etc.*

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CHAPTER I

SUTTON TOWN

AT the entrance to the little village of Sutton stands a small square house. At the back lies a Somersetshire moor; and in front a ridge of hills, not high, but suddenly rising steep and abrupt, and crowned with copse, alternating with large patches of gorse. The slope is checkered like a chess-board, with fields, both arable and grass. But for a few gentle undulations, the hill-top lies even against the sky; and the edge of the moor below draws a line as level as the water which formerly lapped the foot of the hill.

The town (for town it was called, although never more than half a score of houses) consisted of one undeviating street, with cottages and small homesteads on either side. Hidden from the moor by dark orchards, its position was indicated by an irregular row of tall poplar trees. In summer-time, a thin film of grey smoke hanging along the hill-side betrayed the presence of this cluster of human habitations. In winter, thatch and gables and a

corner of the old church tower peeped between the leafless trees. But everything was sheltered and secluded, except the solitary house standing alone on the margin of the moor.

That was whitewashed, and might be seen for miles—with its square windows, sometimes black as ink and sometimes glistening in the sun like gems, its slate roof, rising like a pyramid from the square walls, with a square chimney at the point. From the distance it looked like one of those small meeting-houses not uncommon in that part of the country ; but drawing near you found the windows curtained and the garden carefully kept.

In the early summer of the Year of Grace 1830, two girls were standing by the border between the path and the laurel hedge. The one holding the water-pot was tall and thin, with dark hair and large black eyes. Her dress was very plain, almost Puritanical, but marked with that daintiness which results from instinctive attention to the person. The other, who waited on her, in a print frock with bare arms, brought buckets, one in each hand, with a hoop to keep them from her skirts. She was younger, but stouter, stronger, richer in physique, and the sunlight falling on her brown hair tinged it with red.

“ I almost think, Tamsin, that will be enough. ”

"La! Miss Marion. An' to think that's the last bucket I shall carr' vor ee," said Tamsin, stepping forward to replenish the pot.

"But it is not far to Mrs. Culliford's. And when you come down to the village you must not forget to look in and see me. And you must keep up your reading and writing and—why have you tied up your apron like that?"

The girl blushed, her lip quivered, and she glanced quickly round the garden to assure herself that they were free from observation.

"I thought, Miss Marion—if you 'ood n' take offence—I thought where or no. I mean, I cou'dn' a-bear to goo an'——"

"Oh, Tamsin! You shouldn't. You really shouldn't."

From her apron she had taken a dog, a large, white, china dog with a gold chain around its neck, such as may still be sometimes seen upon a cottage mantelpiece. The choice had taxed her thought. The expenditure had not been unimportant. Of the liberty taken she was well aware. And now in the supreme moment her action seemed doubtful, and she was on the verge of tears.

"Of course I am delighted, Tamsin. Really delighted. But it must have cost you so much. I shall value it more than anything, and keep it in my own room."

“Do ee like un, Miss Marion?” The girl’s face had brightened with delight.

“I do, indeed.”

“I thought you ’ood. I never ca’n’t abide them there liver-coloured ones myself. An’ you’ve a ways a-bin so kind a-larnen o’ me. I shall never forget ee so long as I do live. An’ oh! Miss Marion. Not pay my money if vather do slip in vor the box. Not but what mother’s so good as I be myself.”

“I will be very discreet. Now carry this in, Tamsin, to my room. I will not show it to father to-night. I am coming, too.”

They went upstairs to the bedroom looking out upon the moor. The china dog was safely placed upon the mantel-shelf.

“I must kiss you, Tamsin.”

There were also tears in the eyes of Marion Burt; for the house would be quite strange when Tamsin was gone, and she loved her.

An elderly man came from the further end of the garden, between the espalier trees and the filbert bushes, glanced at the buckets, and waited in the porch.

“Marion! Are you ready for our walk?”

“Coming, Father.”

In rain or sunshine, keeping closer accuracy than the clock in the church tower, at nine in the

morning and three in the afternoon, in winter, but in summer at six, James Burt and his daughter passed through the iron gate at the end of the path and walked out into the world. They never varied from day to day, but only with the seasons. They took always the same direction. Past the cottage of the Sandboys, built upon a strip of way-side waste; past Josiah's homestead with the gigantic stone porch, and the wall of Abraham Bartlett's barton. Then across the road to the raised causeway before the door of Mrs. Carew, and so down the street. By the west wall of the graveyard there opened, in those days, a narrow passage, called by the country people a "drang"; thus they entered a lane leading by a hollow through the wood and away over the hill. Slowly they passed along the hill-top, sometimes strangely magnified against the sky, descended the winding path beyond the gorse, and returned home by the willow-bounded road skirting the moor. The lack of imagination implied in this never-varying routine astonished even Sutton. As Mrs. Culliford remarked to Mrs. Carew, not once, nor twice, but hundreds of times :—

"If Mr. Burt and his maid mus' goo the very same walk twice every day o' their lives, why not sometimes take un t'other way about?"

"An' that's what I do zay," said Mrs. Carew.

Sutton itself was less imaginative than prone to minute observation, and not particularly apt to be severe upon absurdities, of which it unconsciously committed not a few. Yet it felt dissatisfied with the demeanour of James Burt.

To this village, where the ancestry, the business, the opinions of everybody were known to all, he had come, a stranger, when the girl was a little child. Now she was nineteen, and nobody one whit the wiser. Young and old turned to look at her ; but painfully conscious of attracting attention, as she passed along the causeway she used to quicken her pace. With lagging steps her father followed a few yards behind, thus favouring a tradition that this strange couple did not talk.

He was of less than middle height and past middle age. His features were fine and regular to severity, but the soft grey eyes beneath his shaggy eyebrows appeared incapable of wrath. That his hair was white as silver did not add to his years, for there was a quality of sad serenity about his countenance begotten rather of sorrow than of age. His face, always closely shaven, indicated much intellectual power, but this proved no recommendation amongst people prone to regard a new idea as a dangerous explosive. His mouth was vacillating, but sweetly benevolent. He would step off the causeway to make room for the

humblest villager. But in Sutton meekness was no passport to public favour.

The inhabitants of Sutton might easily have been divided into two classes. The one, coarsely boisterous in its enjoyment of life, laughed merrily at these incomprehensible neighbours ; the other, grimly perceiving how small a section of humanity would be qualified for enjoyment in the life to come, abstained from laughter in anticipation of eternal joy. They loved one text and lived by it—“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and *few* there be that find it.” They emphasized the paucity of the elect. There was comfort in this vast exclusiveness. In a topsy-turvy world, where the rich and high-born are not always the brightest examples of piety, it did the hearts of the chosen good to know themselves a spiritual aristocracy. With them unsatisfied curiosity was closely akin to suspicion.

A vague notion existed in Sutton that Mr. Burt had at one time been a minister. He habitually dressed in black. His clothes, though dull and threadbare, were carefully brushed, but his trousers were grotesquely short. This, even with the more serious-minded, could not fail to detract from the veneration due to the dignity of his face ; unless, of course, they knew his doctrine sound, in which case a short trouser-leg might easily add a spiritual

grace. He wore a soft felt hat and a white necktie.

“ An ’eet,” as Mrs. Culliford, the farmer’s wife who lived at the old Manor House, said to Mrs. Carew, the sharp-featured elderly little widow who lived “ down street,” “ If he’s a minister, why do the man never testify? If he were ever a pastor, where did he leave his vlock ? ”

The meeting-house at Upton, a mile over the hill, was irregularly supplied with preachers from neighbouring towns, and thither Sutton folk oftentimes repaired of a Sunday evening in the summer. Mr. Burt himself occasionally attended divine worship in that place. Whether regarded therefore as a question or an argument, Mrs. Culliford’s words were cogent and unanswerable.

Mrs. Culliford had walked down that evening to tea with Mrs. Carew, and they were sitting at the downstairs window, looking out upon the street.

“ Bless my heart alive ! ” cried Mrs. Culliford. “ How Miss Burt have a-shot up, to be sure. Why, she’s taller an’ her father by half a head. An’ ’t wer’ but the wick avore last, so to speak, she wer’ but a little slip of a maid not sweetheart high.”

“ An’ now she’s a ’ooman. Sure she mus’ put on clean collar an’ cuffs every other day.”

“ An’ so she mus’. Sure there’s a main deal

o' trouble wi' the washen o' them-there broidery collars."

"Ah! An' the ironen so well, Mrs. Culliford. Oh aye! The ironen so well."

"An' so 'tes."

"But there she've a-got all her time for certain. Her father mus' ha' property, for sure. Sim to I they mus' be quality volk a-comed down. Critchell the butcher o' Bridgetown do call twice a wick, Mondays an' Thursdays, an' nothen ever booked, but the money a-brought out to door so reg'lar as the sun. We can zee all do pass vrom little dairy-house winder, but never a stranger in or out, leastways if so 'tes unbeknown to me—an' I do rather think I should zee, too."

"To be sure you would. Now that's the worst I do like about being perked up there to Manor House. The grass do come early I don't deny, an' we be out o' the way o' the floods. But there's noo look out. You mid live from year's-end to year's-end, an' never zee a soul but what do come to the house. An' if you do hear wheels in the road, 'tes a-gone like a flash, afore you can get out in time to see what 'tes."

"But what I say is this," reflected Mrs. Carew, weighing the probability of Mr. Burt's gentility with grave deliberation. "Gentry do know gentry. I hope your tea's to your liking, Mrs. Culliford."

" Terr'ble good, thank ee."

'They do git their tea to Bridgetown too, in half-poun' packets six-and-six the poun', an' nothen less. I *do* know that, for the young man, the out-ride, told me so out of his own mouth. But then to be sure it can't be much, for they be but two, an' that do make all the difference."

" An' so do," assented Mrs. Culliford, nodding cordial corroboration.

In this condition of isolation Marion Burt grew into womanhood without associates of her own age, and with no friend but her father. During her childhood there had been a housekeeper at the cottage, an ancient dame, who taught her the use of the needle and the mysteries of house-keeping, but of late no other inmate but Tamsin. Her father had educated her, not only with patient care, but, finding her apt, with the enthusiasm of a scholar; and under his guidance learning became a delight. She mastered Latin and knew some Greek. She was familiar with the heroes of antiquity, and Julius Cæsar crossing the Rubicon was to her a more living reality than jolly farmer John Culliford jogging homewards on his old mare from Bridgetown market across the moor. Nor were the daily walks so monotonous as they appeared to the lively imaginations of Mrs. Culliford and Mrs. Carew. Upon one of

the shelves of her father's library Marion had found White's "Natural History of Selborne," and learned from it the delight of a close observation of nature. They listened to the chiff-chaff in the spring. They noted the coming and going of the martins in the sandy hollow; and waited expectant for the cuckoo's call. They drank in every sight, from the silvering of the thorn to the gilding of the maple; and every sound, from the first note of the thrush to the solitary song of the robin in the winter tree.

Thus to the occasional observer they appeared to loiter aimlessly and look at nothing, and Mrs. Culliford said to Mrs. Carew, with the rich redundancy of negation which is one of the chief charms of that neighbourhood, that she never didn't think they could'n ever be quite right.

Yet how beautiful was life to these two simple people.

The village little dreamt that sometimes of a starlight night when all was still, and every soul in Sutton slept the sleep of the just, they walked out into the garden, or even wandered away across the moor to note the planets and call the constellations by their names. The breath of night sighed through the sedges and the willow trees. The stars looked down upon the still water of the rhine. The unbounded arc of heaven bent over the unbroken

plain. How vast it was! how wonderful! And ever above and behind the innumerable host was hidden the eternal Majesty, who governs them with His infinite wisdom. This thought was always present to James Burt. On these occasions he was wont to pour it forth in reverential awe; and Marion, listening, drank it into her soul. Thus in isolation, but in that rarefied atmosphere of fine feeling which surrounds the summit of elevated thought, the girl grew up unconscious of the flesh-and-blood of human existence.

Once only had nature startled her with a strange, inexplicable note. They were returning to the house from one of these expeditions, on a night in early winter. The wind had risen; clouds were driving across the sky; and everything was hidden and obscured. She drew closer to her father, for the road had become very dark. A row of pollard willows loomed on either side, and suddenly above their heads came a wild whirring of wings, and one solitary wailing cry.

It was not love—this longing of a wild-bird flying south—but the involuntary expression of some unknown restless want. The yearning of it echoed in her ears, the memory remained to haunt her heart.

CHAPTER II

THE IVORY MINIATURE

OF their history previous to settling in Sutton, Marion knew little.

She could dimly remember her father in a black gown, leaning over the pulpit with extended arm. And someone else—it must have been her mother—sitting in the corner of a high-backed pew, looking down at the hassock. Yet even that seemed little more than a dream. And there was present some inexplicable incongruity, perceived at that time by her infant mind and still retained, which made the recollection perplexing and unreal.

To question her father was useless. He set the matter aside in a nervous, hurried way, which reduced her to silence, leaving her with a sense of having pained him. But with increasing years, the desire to learn something of the past had grown into a passion. Was she never to know anything of the woman who bore her? Never to hear one word of story, nor feel one touch of tender reminiscence? What was she like? Was she short? Was she tall? Was she beautiful?

The longing became none the less importunate because there was none to answer it.

Beneath the roof was a small attic, used as a lumber-room ; and there one day, a ray of sunlight came slanting through the little window, pointing like a finger to an old deal box which lay in the corner, carefully corded, but forgotten long ago. Never before had Marion noticed the inscription roughly pencilled on the lid : "*Sermons, etc.*"

At once she felt a wish to examine the contents. There could be no harm in that, and she need not bother her father. Without hesitation she knelt down upon the floor, and with some difficulty unfastened the knots.

The box was full of writings, neatly tied in bundles. Written in her father's small, clear hand were sermons upon sermons—some of surpassing eloquence, many of inordinate length ; but all pencilled at the head of the sheet, just above the text, with the dates of composition and delivery. One after another she took them out with rapid inquisitiveness, promising herself to read them every one at leisure. It would truly be a delight and recreation to her. But as she replaced them in the box, a parcel smaller than the rest attracted her attention. It was quite different to the others, and eagerly opening it, she found a number of letters and a small miniature portrait painted on

ivory. With a thrill of delight she rose, crossed the room, and stood under the window, holding the picture in the clear light.

The head of a young woman, with a beautiful but almost childish face, with large dark eyes and a witching, wayward mouth. Her hair, black as jet, was arranged in loose ringlets around her forehead and on the sides of her head. Perhaps the artist had idealized the dainty beauty of the delicate mouth and chin, yet none could doubt that the picture was a likeness, and as Marion looked, it became more and more familiar, until she clearly recognised the mother she had lost so long ago.

She stood gazing at it with loving emotion. She knew it was her mother. Then how pitiable that this only relic she had ever seen should lie thus confined, neglected and forgotten. It was a sort of sacrilege to leave it like a worthless thing, hidden away and unheeded. And yet the tenderness of her father's nature forbade her to accuse him of coldness or want of affection. Doubtless his very sensibility led him thus to lay aside everything which might awaken sad memories, just as it prevented any reference to the love which he had lost. She could understand that.

With trembling fingers she untied the bundle of letters, all so fair writ in the style of faultless symmetry of the days when penmanship was an

art. They were written before marriage, five-and-twenty years ago, and the ink was faded, having long outlived the tale of love it told. Marian felt no hesitation in reading. It was all so remote that to do so seemed more like an inquiry into history than a peeping behind the privacy of life.

But as she read her heart beat fast, and her cheek flushed.

The words were wild, and without self-restraint in their extravagant expression of passionate and romantic love. Yet they had been very real to the writer, and now they were very real to her who read. There were difficulties—a hint of something clandestine in the correspondence, followed by avowals of unalterable fidelity and undying love. It was afternoon in early spring, and Marion had just returned from her usual walk when she began to read ; but she continued until dusk, drawing closer to the window as the writing faded into illegibility. She had time to learn the whole love story. Even to the withdrawal of opposition, and the reference to future marriage with which the unintentional record suddenly closed.

The last reflected glow of sunset had tinged the darkening clouds with blood. From the topmost twig of an elm tree on the hill-side a thrush was pouring forth his last song, startling the soft air with interjected phrases bursting from his throb-

bing throat. The girl could read no longer, but she still remained holding the letters in her hand. She had drunk the love potion. It quickened her heart and made her head swim, like wine with one who has never before tasted it. Yet how could she, as yet untouched by passion, sound the depth of this turbulent emotion into which she looked? In the sweet atmosphere of youth and spring, she saw only the beauty, but never questioned the unalterable quality of Love. And thus she understood the happiness her father once possessed—and lost.

“Marion!”

His voice recalled her. She quickly re-tied the letters, to return them to the box. They were mostly signed “Marion,” but one in full, “Marion Holbyn,” and thus she learned at last her mother’s maiden name.

But she did not replace the portrait. She pressed it to her lips, kissing it again and again in an ecstasy of delight. It was as if a great vacancy had been filled, a long-felt want supplied. She could now picture the mother of whom hitherto she had only vaguely dreamed; and the beauty of the face was a source of exultation and delight. She quickly unbuttoned her dress, and hid upon her bosom the tiny oval likeness in its smooth, black frame. Then she ran downstairs in response to her father’s call.

For several days Marion thus carried her new-found treasure, but as the first excitement wore away, she began to suffer misgivings, and to doubt whether she ought thus to appropriate that which had been so carefully hidden from sight. The spirit of gentleness and simple candour marking all her father's actions rendered it impossible to practise deceit upon him. She felt assured he would not deny to her this relic, which sorrow alone could have driven him to remove from sight. More than this, she longed to know it an absolute possession ; and yet she hesitated to speak. At last this desire overcame her fear, and one morning she summoned courage to enter his study.

It was a small room looking out upon the moor. The walls were hidden with books. The chairs were old-fashioned, of rosewood with horsehair seats, and ornamented with brass-headed nails. In a corner stood a celestial globe, by aid of which they sometimes worked out problems as an intellectual recreation. Busily writing at a table covered with manuscripts, it was easy to believe him engaged on some interminable book. As she entered, he glanced up, but continued his work.

Presently he laid aside his pen, and asked with his habitual tranquility and sweetness—

" Do you want any help, Marion ? "

" No, dear Father. It was not that. But the

other day I found this. May I keep it ? ” And she held the miniature towards him.

He became so agitated that his lip quivered, and for a moment he could not speak. Then, with an effort he subdued his emotion, and answered :—

“ Yes. Keep it.”

“ It is my mother ? ”

He sighed, rose from the table, and crossed to the window looking out upon the moor. She could not see his face, only his figure dark against the glass. He seemed to tremble, and she thought he was in tears.

“ Yes. Your mother.”

Her heart melted with pity for his bereavement. She had touched his sorrow ; re-opened the wound ; and she suffered an agony of self-reproach. Yet the question was so importunate, she could not help asking it.

“ One word more, Father ! How old was I when my mother died ? ”

He raised his hand to his forehead as if to concentrate his thoughts and fix his attention on the distant past. For a full minute there was silence. Then he answered quite calmly, as if he had only waited to consider.

“ She was taken from me—when you were three years of age.”

CHAPTER III

TRANTER COOMBS

THAT summer was the "most catchingest" ever experienced in the memory of man. It had been "terr'ble teäsen for the haymaken"; but Mr. John Culliford, of the Manor Farm at Sutton, had come almost to the last load. Seated on his white cob he encouraged the workers. The great yellow wagon slowly proceeded between the "weales," as they used to call the long ridges of fresh-made hay, whilst the pitchers lifted and the loaders spread the sweet-smelling crop. The women-folk in cotton frocks and sun-bonnets were busy with rakes. The group stood out in bold relief against a background of elm trees; but the rick was in a distant field, and the white gate stood open in the hedgerow.

In a corner of the field children had come to play, and Johnny Sandboy was running after Mary Eliza Clarke. He caught her, smothered her in hay, and the child screamed. Then one of the women stopped raking, turned round, and called in a shrill voice:—

"Lef the little maid alone, young huzburd, or I'll put the little stick about your back."

Experience and a large family had taught Mrs. Sandboy that it was never unwise to check the exuberance of youth.

"'Tes somethen to do wi' the childern," she said, half to herself. "'Tes a'most time the bwoy were to work."

"Zo 'tes, Missus. Zo 'tes," said Mr. John Culliford. Then he glanced at the sun above the little spinney on the hillside, turned his horse's head, and rode slowly towards the house.

He dismounted, threw the rein over the barton gate-post, and stood at his full height a moment, stretching his limbs. He was tall enough—five feet eleven or so—and broad beyond the dreams of ambition. More than three score years of age, he was still erect as in youth, standing as straight as one of his own cider-butts, which, although possessed of a rich rotundity, does not in spirit depart from the perpendicular.

Again he glanced at the sun, his customary clock, now rising above the cowl of the tall kitchen chimney. Then he strolled leisurely into the road—a road white and dusty, passing without hedge-rows through the open fields—and shading his eyes with his hand, gazed into the distance. At last he turned back to the house, passed through

the garden, and stood by the porch before the open door.

“ Missus! Missus!” Mr. John Culliford’s utterances often betrayed a latent excitability scarcely to be suspected from the deliberation of his movements.

“ What is it, John ? ”

“ Here’s Tranter Coombs have a-turned the top of the hill.”

There was a deal of colour about Farmer John Culliford, standing there in the shadow of the grey old building. Little flat brass buttons glistened above his blue hose at the knees of his cord breeches, and down one side of his red waistcoat, wide open because of the warm weather. For the same reason he wore no coat, and his shirt-sleeves were snowy white. Around his throat was a cotton neckcloth of a little sprig pattern tied in a bow and his face was round and rosy, rosy from every conceivable reason—from the sun, from a moderate consumption of cider, from shaving with a doubtful razor, and above all from a thorough good English heart which thumped within his bosom.

“ Come, Missus! Come ! ”

Then Mrs. Culliford, comely and comfortable as himself, came into the porch, a brown cup in one hand, a willow-patterned plate with a crust of bread and cheese in the other.

"'Tis a wonderful sight o' grapes to-year if they do but ripen," she said, glancing at the vine which covered one side of the house, between the tall mullioned windows. "But the thunderstorm have a-beat about the flower-knot shameful."

And so they contentedly waddled down to the gate to await the tranter.

The old Manor House at Sutton stands remote from the remainder of the parish. Even in those days it had ceased to be a mansion for more than a century and a half, and the added farm buildings were already in a condition of respectable decay. There was no large landed proprietor resident in the village, and the Cullifords had been the principal inhabitants time out o' mind. They always held land in Sutton, and had rented the house for many generations. Their cider-butts filled the old baronial hall, and they kept a chain-harrow in the ancient kitchen. But the little ivy-covered chapel with Gothic windows, and ornamented with the faded escutcheons of a forgotten race, still remained in good preservation, and had never suffered desecration. It stood detached from the farmhouse, or linked only by a broken ruined wall. And at evening when the sun was low, and the slightest inequality of the ground cast a shadow clear and well defined, beside the road and in the home-field might be traced the foundations of forgotten homes.

To the ordinary observer nothing remained but heaps and holes and hollows. But a sense of solitude was always present at the place, and in winter or on rainy days a spirit of desolation.

No! If you are one of these high-flyers, requiring life and movement, to see the butcher's cart twice a week, the doctor's gig in times of epidemic, and to learn accurately where the parson calls, you must go to Sutton-street. No one came by the Manor Farm but Tranter Coombs, and this loneliness accounted in some measure for the cordiality of Mr. Culliford's greeting.

"Well, William Coombs. An' how's William Coombs to-day?"

"Amongst the middlens, Zir. Amongst the middlens. An' how's Mr. John Culliford to-day? My respects, Mim."

The carrier, a sharp-eyed, active little man in high gaiters and a kittle-smock, drew his van across the road, removed the bit, that his bony old mare, in whom all levity had long been crushed beneath the constant load, might moisten her mouth with the wayside grass, and then seated himself on the uppinstock by the side of the garden-hatch.

"'Tes warm," said he. "My van's so hot as a oven."

"Terr'ble warm," echoed the Cullifords.

"But 'tes what's a-wanted. Here's luck."

Happy, happy days! when man might drink at ease, and conversation could not be hurried.

Anything fresh to Bristol-town?" ventured Mrs. Culliford.

"Aye, aye! There's a fine bobbery over to Paris in France, Mrs. Culliford, Mim. So I've a-heard tell, but I ha'n't a-zeed it. Why, 'tes next kin to a miracle, an' do a'most cap Jericho, if 'tes true. You never didden hear no sich work in all your born days, nor Meäster nother. Why, the poppleation, wi' nothen but a han'-vull o' stones apiece, have a-beat back the French army, an' carr'ed the corpses all roun' town, for all the world like mommets of a Guy Fawkes' day, an' then put 'em up in stacks athurt the street to stop the traffic. An' zoo by sich means they've a-tookt the Royal Palace, an' now they do think to gie the king the zack."

"Oh?" complacently grunted Mr. John Culliford, for the doings of an inferior people in an inferior place did not interest him deeply.

"Meäster don't worrit his head about foreigners. Tidden wo'th while," explained Mrs. Culliford.

"Aye! Things be in a terr'ble bad state; an' 'tes all in the almanac a put out so true as the light," ran on this merry little pessimist. "Why, they do zay there's a new complaint a-comen these way. Do catch ee in the stomick like, an' afore

you've a-got time to look roun' or make your will your inzides be a-tied up in knots. But 'tes all a judgment, Mr. Culliford, Zir, 'tes all a judgment you might depend. Life's all such a hurry-push these times. Tidden so steady-wholesome as 't were years ago by. 'Tes all along o' this here new-fangled machinery——”

“Meäster don't employ no machinery to the present time,” interposed Mrs. Culliford.

“—— an' them-there new railroads they do talk about. Aye, aye! When God-A'mighty made this wordle, He never thought o' it all, Mr. John Culliford, Zir. He never meant it, Zir. Why, if God-A'mighty had allotted man to truckle on 'pon rails, He wouldn' never a-made ho'ses wi' vour lags. He wouldn' a-zend tranterers. Tidden natural, Mr. Culliford, Zir, an' do turn the wordle topsy-turvy, an' breed a lot o' discontent wi' thoughtful folk.”

The tranter raised his billycock hat, and thoughtfully passed his fingers through his wiry grey hair.

“Meäster don't think them-there railroads 'll ever answer—not for long,” explained Mrs. Culliford.

“'Tull be the ruination o' tranteren if they should. But there, they never won't. There'll be a revolution first, so safe as a gun.”

“Meäster don't want no revolutions here,” piped Mrs. Culliford.

“Well, Mim,” continued the tranter, instructively. “’T’es all along o’ these here agitators, you zee do come from up the country zomewhere wi’ a wonderful preachment ’bout reform an’ disturbution o’ property an’ all that. If a man got a ho’s’e an’ cart, they do want two lags an’ a wheel o’ un, sim-zo. Why they’ve a-had a meeting a-top o’ Bridgeton Common, an’ Urch Vry took the chair ’pon a gate-post for to keep order like, an’ a terr’ble bunchy little feller, not one o’ these parts, hopped up ’pon top o’ stone wall, an’ massy ’pon us! how he did wag his tongue to be sure. An’ he werden but a little feller another; but lauk! he’d talk a horse’s head off. Dall his buttons! Why he’d talk a hive o’ bees to death. Aye, aye! The country’s all to a upstore—but I’ve a-got a bit of a bill here.”

The tranter put down the cup on the uppinstock, hurried across to the van, and returned with a small handbill, which he handed to Mr. Culliford.

“’T’es a-thought ’tes Cap’n Swing hiszelf. But you keep the paper, Zir. ’T’es hard upon noon. I must get on. Thank ee kindly, Mim. Good marnen, Mr.Culliford, Zir. Good marnen, Mim.”

“Mr. Coombs. Mr. Coombs. One minute. You ha’n’t a-heard anywhere of a new pa’son for Zutton. Have ee?”

The tranter paused with his hand on the rein,

and thought deeply for at least a minute and a half. "I can't call to mind that I have," he replied, slowly. Then he clambered into the van, and the old mare went jogging along the dusty road. Presently he reached the entrance to the Manor Farm, and turned into the highway through Sutton. He passed the empty parsonage, the little church with its squat tower, and pulled up before the White Hart. Then the parish gradually collected around Tranter Coombs. He became the centre of the admiring multitude of Sutton. There was John Sandboy, with his hands in his pockets, and Josiah Clarke, with his smock rolled up around his waist, and Abraham Bartlett, the parish clerk. Even the children came round to listen to the tranter's wonderful harangue, which lasted full an hour by the clock in Sutton Tower. Then he said he must be going. But he gave the men a bill apiece, thus leaving serious occupation for the wit of Sutton.

He stopped by the causeway because there was a parcel for Mrs. Carew. He pulled rein before the cottage with the stickle roof, to shout friendly inquiries to Gramfer Sandboy, sitting in his arm-chair out of doors in the sunshine. Then he turned the corner by the square white house, and jogged away across the moor.

CHAPTER IV

A DETERMINED FELLOW

THEY stood with folded arms, without moving from the Manor Farm gate, and watched the tranter out of sight.

“ So I suppose there’s nothing settled yet,” said Mrs. Culliford, thinking of the new parson, as she turned to look over her husband’s arm at the hand-bill which he at last began slowly to read aloud.

KEEP A SHARP LOOK-OUT.

“ It is believed that the fires in the neighbourhood of Pewsey, Wilts, have been caused by a man seen near the spot, either before or immediately after their breaking out, and who is supposed to have gone westward, making inquiries of shepherds and labourers respecting the situation of farms and circumstances relating to them. He is about forty years of age, riding a long-legged, light-carcassed, sorrel-coloured blood-horse with a switch tail. He is believed to assume various disguises, but is generally seen riding fast through villages and towns with something different from a common riding-stick, with which he

is constantly striking the horse's off shoulder. It is suspected that the thing thus carried is some unlawful weapon or engine."

Mrs. Culliford shuddered. The description of the horse was so minute, whilst the man was left so largely to the imagination.

"'Tes all very well now in summer," she said. "But I do dread the long winter nights."

"They'll never come to Zutton. You mid rest your heart content," replied Farmer Culliford, sniffing the air. "How sweet the mignonette do smell" So they passed up the garden path, returning, she to the house, and he to the hurry-push of practical life.

He did not take the cob, the boy had led it to the stable; but he walked across the paddock and through the orchard to the hay-field. A pick had been left stuck into the ground, and in passing he took it to use as a walking-stick. Then something happened which, whilst it awakened his curiosity, aroused his displeasure. Mrs. Sandboy stopped work and walked to the hedgerow. The other woman raking behind the wagon soon followed. They called to the pitchers, and these strolled over to the shade of the elm-trees. The loaders leaned on their picks, shaded their eyes from the sunlight, and watched.

Mr. John Culliford's countenance assumed a deeper hue, he quickened his pace, and, as bodies

in rapid motion readily catch the eye, was at once observed by the delinquent haymakers.

"Heigh! you lazy chaps there!"

The work-folk hurried back to the wagon. Only Mrs. Sandboy loitered a moment longer, shouting to a stranger in the lane on the other side of the hedge, and pointing with her bare arm towards the village.

"What's all this, then? What's this?"

"Tis some foreigner, Zir." In Sutton an unknown person was always a foreigner. "He do ax a sight o' questions, I sim. He wanted to know terr'ble about the wold Manor House. An' how many farms in parish. An' if the lane do lead out by the church. An' I told un iss——"

"A horseback?" inquired Mr. Culliford, quickly.

"Aye, long-lagged ho'se, like a rail."

Scarcely were the words uttered when the stranger, picking his way down the hill-side, slowly passed the open gate. Through this gap in the tall hedgerow, Mr. Culliford unmistakably distinguished a sorrel-coloured nag. The rider appeared to carry in his hand a short staff, and tapped encouragement upon the horse's off shoulder. For a moment Mr. Culliford stood spellbound; then he followed without another word.

Across the field was a footpath to the village. Taking this short cut, Mr. Culliford crossed the

lane, strode through the narrow passage between the church and the parsonage, and reached the White Hart as the stranger was riding into the inn-yard. At a glance all his worst suspicions were confirmed.

All the village worthies, Josiah Clarke, Abraham Bartlett, and John Sandboy were still there, scarcely recovered from the departure of the tranter. Guests were rare, except in the evenings or of a wet day, and the inn-keeper was in the field. But John Sandboy, a giant in a fustian coat, with a talent for performing little odd services, volunteered to lead the horse to the stable.

Josiah Clarke and Abraham Bartlett, simple souls, looked on with the deepest interest, but without one thought of harm.

“Well, Mr. John Culliford. An’ how’s Mr. John Culliford to-day?”

“There’s nothen wrong, I hope?” questioned Abraham, for the farmer’s mien was bellicose, and he still carried the pick.

“Wrong! For God’s sake! hide away thik bill, Josiah, you’ve a-got in your han’. Stand round quiet like an’ take no notice. Did ee see thik man? Did ee cast your eye over the ho’s e as he went by? ’T es the man in the bill, so sure as the devil’s in hell. Hush! Don’t sim to take no notice. —Aye, aye! shall carry the last o’ it afore dark.”

The stranger had returned as Mr. Culliford thus raised his voice from a mysterious whisper. His every action was suspicious. He passed the little group without a word, and walked slowly up the village. Unconscious of being observed, he stopped on the causeway and looked at Josiah's house. His eye seemed to linger lovingly on the stacks in Abraham Bartlett's mow-barton.

"But the man's never forty, Mr. Culliford. Why, 'tes so much as ever he's thirty. An' yet you never can't tell."

Josiah was flaxen-haired, with the mildest blue eyes in creation. His natural timidity led him thus to raise futile objections, and immediately to explain them away.

"Ha! He's a evil-looking feller to my mind. Let's goo an' look at the ho'se," suggested Mr. Culliford.

John Sandboy was rubbing down the horse. He was to give him a handful of hay and a mouthful of water, as the gentleman would be only a short time in Sutton, he said.

"He idden so terr'ble long-laggèd," demurred Josiah. "An' eet o' coose he idden short."

"I should call un long-laggèd, myself," said Abraham.

"An' he idden not to zay light-carcassed. Though to be sure he ha'n't a-got much of a barrel."

" Noo man living could call un a heavy-carcassed ho'se," argued Mr. Culliford.

" I should have a-zaid the colour wer' more of a chestnut. Not but what many 'ud term un a sorrel 'ithout doubt. An' he ha'n't a-got a switch-tail. But then they mid a-docked the tail o' un, for certain. I think 'tes the ho'se."

" So sure as my name's John Culliford, that's the ho'se."

Silence fell upon these three wise men of Sutton, as this conviction with its heavy weight of responsibility was forced upon them.

" He axed a main lot o' questions," said John Sandboy. " Whether there wer' ever a fuss in parish about the tithes. An' whether there wer' a bobbery about the machinery."

" A gallis-rogue !" ejaculated Abraham Bartlett, the parish clerk, a bunchy little man with a round face, a rich bass voice, and a very determined character.

" But we daren't lay a han' upon the man," said Josiah nervously.

" Then let John Sandboy run for the life o' un over the hill to Upton for Constable Moggridge,—'tes but little better 'an a mile,—an' ask the constable to ride over to once. Run, John. Best voot avore. An' we'll keep a eye 'pon the rascal the while. Constable can put un a few questions, I'll

warrant un. If he do only come in time," cried Mr. Culliford.

This messenger despatched, they returned to the village street to look about them. Little Jack Sandboy, in his smock, was playing hick-stone on the flags before the lich-gate. The stranger was staring at the parsonage. Then he sauntered up and spoke to the boy; and presently Johnny's little hob-nailed boots came rattling along the causeway.

"Where't gwaine?" cried the clerk.

"Up to house vor the chitch-kay."

"Ah! A cunnen fox. He do want to make believe to look at the chitch. There, 't'ull take up his time. That's one thing."

They watched the stranger enter by the west door, and waited long for his reappearance, but in vain. Then Josiah, with a sigh, happening to lift his blue eye to heaven upon a thought of his hay, caught sight of a dark figure leaning against a battlement of the tower.

"Dash my wig!" cried Mr. John Culliford. "If the double-faced rascal ha'n't a-gone up there to look around. He can zee every stack in parish from chitch-tower. Run down, Abraham, an' lock the chitch-door. Then we shall have un so tight as wax. You thought he'd a-went away an' lef' the kay in door. Zo you locked the door an'

brought on the kay. Goo on, Abraham—make haste. Avore he do come down."

The scheme recommended itself to Abraham from every point of view. It was easy, subtle, and effective, and lay well within his province as custodian of the key.

"To do the thing proper we ought to keep out o' sight," suggested Josiah. "Else he'll holla to us from top o' tower."

"I tell ee what," chimed in Mr. Culliford. "When Abraham have a-turned the kay an' put un in his pocket, let un zit down in porch. Then we'll get a crust o' bread an' cheese an' a cup o' cider, an' while the feller's a-creepen down tower-stairs we'll nip in an' zit down so quiet as mice. Then we shall hear all an' zee when Constable do ride up street."

This admirable plan was successfully carried out in every detail. Mr. Culliford with Josiah carrying the cup in both hands with tender care, joined Abraham in the porch, and the three sat in a row on the stone seat underneath the churchwarden's notices. They listened to the prisoner groping his way down the tower steps. They winked when he tried the porch door, and ran into danger of apoplexy from suppressed laughter to hear him ejaculate his disgust. Then he walked rapidly round the church.

"I reckon he'll bom the bell," whispered Josiah. Then everything became as silent as the grave.

"Ah, sly-minded rogue. He's afeard to bom the bell," whispered Mr. Culliford.

"Hush!" said Abraham.

They sat for full three hours; but still the constable did not come. Perhaps, having begun harvest, he could spare no time to attend to the king's peace. And Josiah ought to have gone a-milking, too; and Abraham was not sure but what the dealer might have come about them pigs. When the sun went dropping behind the old thatched roofs of Sutton, and the shadows from the grave-stones stretched away to the churchyard wall, Mr. Culliford began to show symptoms of uneasiness. He doubted whether they dared imprison a man in this way. You can no more by law confine a man interminably in a church than you can sit by nature indefinitely in a porch. The very silence became ominous.

"I wish to goodness he would bom the bell," he whispered earnestly.

"Ay! An' then we could ope' the door so innocent as babes," sighed Josiah.

"I'll walk roun' an' shut up the winders to keep out the bats," suggested Abraham. "You bide where you be."

Abraham entered the church and solemnly re-

arranged the windows. Those that were open he shut to keep out bats ; those that were shut he opened to let in air. But nowhere did he find trace of the prisoner. He looked everywhere, from the font to the pulpit, and peered over the high-backed oaken pews without success. He called his companions, and they also searched in vain. They toiled up the tower. They explored the gallery and looked under the seats. But they found only a map of the parish traced on transparent paper and rolled around a rod. On the back were notes of glebe and farms, with the proportion of arable and pasture in each, roughly pencilled. It had been laid down on Mr. Culliford's seat in the chancel.

"Ah! They got their eye 'pon Zutton, you zee," sighed Josiah, with the guilty knowledge on his conscience of having thought of a new thrashing machine.

The three worthies reassembled and held a sort of parish vestry in the porch.

"He can't a-vell asleep surely," said Abraham, whose official experience had rendered him conversant with the soporific virtues of the church.

"Goo an' catch a weasel asleep," replied Mr. Culliford.

"He ca'n't a-hid hizself away till night, to let hizself down over tower wi' bellropes," suggested

Josiah, but tentatively and without desire to force his opinion in the face of unwilling acceptance.

"I vote we do lock un in again," proposed Mr. Culliford. "We be all witness there's nobody here. An' he ca'n't goo 'ithout his ho'se. Let's goo over to White Hart, an' turn a kay 'pon the ho'se."

The idea was good. They strolled solemnly back to the inn. But the horse had been gone for hours. In the sanded parlour, John Sandboy was taking his well-earned ease, with a cup and a long clay pipe. The constable had been busy killing a pig, and did not dare to lay hands on any man without a warrant; so John had run home full-pelt across the fields, and come against the stranger full-butt in the White Hart yard. The man gave him a shilling, and rode away at a walk.

Look at it how you would, it was a terrible funny thing; and the more Mr. Culliford thought the deeper did the mystery become. And not until Sunday week did Abraham Bartlett discover that the little chancel door had been forced open. Some one had drawn the staple with the iron stem of the clerk's candlestick.

"An' thik door hadn't a-bin oped this vive-an'-twenty year," reflected Abraham.

"Ha! A determined feller," said Mr. John Culliford.

CHAPTER V

ALL HURRY-PUSH

ALTHOUGH Sutton was certainly quiet, so much variety enlivened its simple life that it was never dull. Everything came around in due season, floods, flowers and fruit, all fresh from Nature's hand ; and if there were no novelties, neither was there anything that was not new. And then the depth of human sympathy in the people ! The minute interest they took in the proceedings and good fortune of others ! When Mrs. Clarke by the rule of simple addition raised Josiah's family to fourteen, Mrs. Carew stood on the causeway full two hours waiting to intercept the doctor's departing gig. She was anxious for the welfare of the mother. And in respect of the new-comer (a matter of minor importance, one would think, in a progeny so numerous) she felt curious to ascertain the sex. Then she hastened to be first at the Manor Farm with the information.

But one day early in September, Sutton Street became a scene of unparalleled activity. In the morning Mr. Poltimore drove up with an unknown

friend and a brace of pointers. In a village destitute of gentry for at least a couple of centuries, with only the memorial tablets in the little church to speak of a forgotten grandeur, Mr. Poltimore, the estate-agent, was a personality of vast importance. A florid man of fine presence and imposing dignity, his slightest movement awakened a breathless interest. People listened to his words and afterwards repeated them. "Where's John Sandboy? Doesn't John Sandboy know I am here?" Everybody was off to the cottage with the stickle roof. Then John, pulling on his fustian jacket, came running down the street. Not being a landowner, with a fine sense of fitness in things, Mr. Poltimore did not keep a gamekeeper; but on sporting expeditions John was his body-guard, and at all times understood to keep an eye upon the game. Peering above her window-blind, Mrs. Carew noticed that contrary to custom the party had gone first to the Manor House instead of to the hill. Now why was that? And who was Mr. Poltimore's friend?

A little later the postman passed through the parish. He brought a letter for Mr. John Culliford, an event which did not happen once in a twelvemonth. Now what could that be about? A new pa'son for Sutton, I wonder? 'Twas to be hoped, sure, there was nothing the matter.

And then Constable Moggridge came over from Upton, without doubt to look into that little matter of four weeks ago, because, if he dared not to take the man up without a warrant, it was just as well to know what was going on. He, Josiah Clarke, and Abraham Bartlett stayed talking so long by the corner of the churchyard wall that it really made Mrs. Carew's blood boil to think how men-folk could waste their time. Unless of course there was anything wrong. For sure! there is nothing wrong—is there?

Apparently not. In course of time these village worthies separated to go about their business—all but Solomon Moggridge who slowly went “up street.” As sure as fate there must be something in the wind, for wherever could Solomon be going? Mrs. Carew could scarcely contain her curiosity, as she saw the constable cross the road and enter the gate of the square white house. What could he want there? Was he begging for the chapel at Upton—or what?

With truly feline persistence she waited.

Presently the constable reappeared, followed by Mr. Burt and Marion; but in the street they parted, he to take the path across the fields to Upton, and they to start upon their walk.

Down the causeway they came as usual; but Mr. Burt was talking, and the girl intently listened.

As they came by the window, little Mrs. Carew drew quickly back, but waited within hearing.

"I do not like the errand," he said nervously. "It seems like an intrusion. But I could not say no."

"No, dear Father," Marion replied softly, "you could not say no."

Mrs. Carew popped back to the window, and craning forward her thin neck until her sharp chin almost touched the pane, keenly watched the retreating figures. But, heart alive! they passed the drang-way and kept to the road right down through parish by the church. Little Mrs. Carew immediately perceived that in such incidents as these lies the making of history. She decided that there was just time before dinner to clap on her bonnet and pop over to Manor Farm.

Unconscious of attracting observation Mr. Burt and Marion pursued their way. They took the open road to Mr. Culliford's, so often travelled by Tranter Coombs. The sky was clear, and not a drop of rain had fallen for a fortnight; and as behind them the kissing-gate fell back against the post, a flock of starlings rose by the hedgerow, turned in the air, and alighted in the further corner of the field. Wagtails were running on the grass between the cows; and, although the air was still as soft as summer, swallows had congregated on the roofs of the farm buildings.

"No; I could scarcely refuse," he repeated, as they passed the uppinstock. "He said they thought of me because I so often go to church. Yet I only know Mr. Culliford by sight. I sometimes think, Marion, this isolation may have been unwise."

He looked at her affectionately, as if she were indeed the subject of this doubt; but she only smiled. "Perhaps we shall see Tamsin, Father," she said quite gaily. And so they passed between the grape-vine and the flower-knot, entered the great porch, and rapped upon the open door.

But Mr. John Culliford, always in red waist-coat and white shirt-sleeves, was there himself, beaming open-hearted good nature. Now to see Mr. John Culliford improving his mind with the tranter, or gravely judicial with Abraham and Josiah was one thing; but Mr. John Culliford hospitable was quite another.

"Walk in, Zir. Walk in, Missie," he cried, leading the way into the great kitchen. "Now zit down, both o' ee, do. Not there, Missie, in the draught o' the winder. Why all these years you've a-lived to Zutton, an' this the vu'st time you've a-comed to see John Culliford. Now, what 'll you take, Zir? Ay! Now Missie 'ud like to put her tooth into a good zwit apple——"

"No, thank you, Mr. Culliford," interposed Marion.

"Ees you 'ood. I do know you 'ood."

At once he went off in search of that succulent fruit, and Marion had leisure to look around her. Bright green shoots of ivy were sprawling across the diamond-shaped panes, and clinging to the tall mullions which ran almost to the dark oak ceiling. The floor was paved with cool blue flags, worn here and there into hollows by feet long ago at rest. Everything was sweet and refreshing, from the plates and dishes glistening on the dresser shelves to the shining oaken bench flanked with long stools. Her eye rested a moment on the high-backed settle, flitted to the dried herbs hanging against the wall, and finally settled upon the clavey board above the immense open fireplace, where hung a cavalry sword quite new and bright as silver.

"Mr. Culliford must have joined the new Yeomanry troop," said Mr. Burt.

"Yeomanry troop. To be zure he have. Zo 'ud you, Zir, if you wur ten year younger," cried the farmer, returning at that moment with a double handful of apples. "Here, Missie, take one, an' hold up your pocket. There, Mrs. John Culliford have a-gone up to tiddyvate, so you'll excuse she, wu'n't ee? Mr. Poltimore 'ull be in by'm-by. Ay, Mr. Burt, the country is in a terr'ble state. 'Tes high

time somethen wur a-done, sure enough, or we shall all be a-burned in our beds some fine night avore we can zo much as turn roun' to think where we be. But 'tes a judgment, Mr. Burt, for all this panderen to Popery. You don't hold wi' this-here putten all the power into the han's o' Popery, do ee? No ; you be a Churchman, vor all you mid walk over to Upton of a Zunday night in summer. That's nothen. There's no harm in that. More vor fresh air, an' to stretch your lags like, 'an 'tes to hear the Methodies."

Emboldened by this approval, so strangely bearing upon the object of his visit, Mr. Burt began :—

" I greatly esteem your liberality, Mr. Culliford——"

" Not at all—not at all," interrupted the farmer, probably thinking of the apples.

" The more so as I came to ask a favour——"

" Zo do ee then. Zo do ee."

" Mr. Moggridge called upon me——"

" What, Solomon Moggridge? He's a terr'ble poor constable. Don't zay a word o' Solomon Moggridge."

" On behalf of the good people of Upton, of course, to entreat me to solicit of your good nature, permission to use occasionally during the winter months your little chapel."

"No! Not vor thirty thousan' Solomon Moggridges. No!" The explosive suddenness of Mr. John Culliford's refusal quite silenced gentle Mr. Burt. "No! No Methodies here. Never while John Culliford do live. Don't let 'em come here. Solomon Moggridge, indeed! No. I be a Churchman born an' bred. 'Tes no good to come wi' thik tale to John Culliford——"

"I am sorry to have annoyed you, Mr. Culliford," faltered Mr. Burt as he rose to take his leave.

"'Noyed I? You ha'n't 'noyed I," replied the farmer in apparent suprise. "Solomon Moggridge indeed! Do ee sit down, Mr. Burt. Well then, if you ca'n't stay now, do ee come in again. Look in any time you do come theäs way. Solomon Moggridge, indeed! Very glad to ha' made your 'quaintance, Mr. Burt. Good day, Zir. Good day, Missie."

The visitors reached the road with sighs of relief as if in thankfulness for deliverance from an earthquake or sudden whirlwind. They had only been in the house five minutes, and Marion's pocket was crammed full of apples. "Yet perhaps I ought to have reasoned with him," reflected Mr. Burt half sadly. And on the footpath across the fields little Mrs. Carew was climbing over a distant stile with considerable judgment and precision.

Mrs. Culliford, having popped upstairs to put herself tidy, and chancing to peep from her bedroom window between the looking-glass and the curtain into the home-field, took careful note of the approaching visitor.

Mrs. Carew was evidently not intending to stay. The absence of the basket containing the work, the cap, and the mittens precluded that possibility. Mrs. Culliford hastily finished her toilet, and hurried out to welcome Mrs. Carew at the open door.

"Good marnen, Mrs. C'rew. An' how's Mrs. C'rew?"

"Good marnen, Mrs. Culliford," responded Mrs. Carew.

"Now do ee walk in an' zit down in the cool. Take the chair by the window, unless you be afeard o' the draught. Now, do ee take off your bonnet, Mrs. C'rew."

They were great moralists, Mrs. Culliford and Mrs. Carew!

To spend an hour with them was to become not only enlightened, but spiritually refreshed.

Of the two, living in the centre of Sutton, as it were in the very vortex of civilization, Mrs. Carew was perhaps the better informed, but Mrs. Culliford possessed the happier philosophy. They were the most important ladies in Sutton, and Mrs. Carew

supported her dignity upon two little rigid curls, two little tortoise-shell combs, and a little something caught up in a net of chinille. Being a widow comfortably left, she wore black whenever she went out on a visit ; and thus was entitled to a respectful sympathy such as the most enduring wife cannot claim.

"I ca'n't stay, thank ee, Mrs. Culliford. But there, I mid zo well just undo the strings."

Mrs. Carew never unexpectedly took off her bonnet, for reasons best known to herself, but fully recognised by other ladies. The invitation, therefore, was a delicate refinement on the part of Mrs. Culliford. So they sat face to face by the window, and the breeze fluttered the long black strings. Mrs. Culliford—honest, motherly soul—would have made two of Mrs. Carew, and having tiddyvated, she wore a front which the most fastidious could not have called false, so frankly did it invite admiration as a work of art.

"An' zo you've a-had visitors," said the little woman, with a toss of the head.

"Only to ask for the little chapel ; but there, o' cou'se Meäster had his own mind to use. He don't hold much wi' the Methodies. Not but what there mus' be different sorts in the world, I suppose. We ca'n't be all alike," replied placid Mrs. Culliford.

“That’s very true,” reflected Mrs. Carew. “Different heads, different thoughts. That’s how ’tes, you see; but all ordained no doubt for a wise purpose.” She suddenly sank her voice to an awesome whisper. “You don’t happen to know who ’tes out wi’ Mr. Poltimore, I suppose?”

“One Mr. Hensley. Been abroad. He do want to live twelve months at a farm to get a insight. Meäster took to the man terr’ble. But la! I don’t think I could abide strangers here.”

“What! is there a talk o’ his coming to Manor Farm?” And, eager with inquisitiveness, little Mrs. Carew poked forward her sharp thin face.

“No; Mr. Poltimore just threw out a hint like. But there, massy ’pon us! I should be afeard o’ my life wi’ a strange face a’ways about house for a twelvemonth. An’ folk be zo different——”

“They be. I thought the zame me very own zelf a little by-now. There I bin to sich a bustle all day, that never a minute have I had to zit down an’ draw breath, zo to speak; but I *did* just bechance to catch zight o’ Solomon Moggridge out in street a-talken wi’ Josiah Clarke and Abraham Bartlett, an’ really to zee they dree voolish men were zo good as a play; for Josiah did mop his forehead, an’ Abraham did scratch his crown, an’ Solomon did hold out his vore-vinger to explain, that really if I hadn’ a-felt so angry I should

a-laughed outright. Oh! by-the-bye! I zaw post-man goo up across—not bad news, I hope?”

“No. Only to zay new pa’son ’ull be here Zunday wick. But only to preach—not to bide.”

“Oh, Zunday wick. That’ll be zummat to tell Zutton volk then. Well, ’tes to be hoped he wu’n’t be one o’ they whose thoughts be all a-zet ’pon things o’ theäs world. But you be busy, Mrs. Culliford, wi’ Mr. Poltimore about an’ all——”

From that moment Mrs. Carew began to exhibit symptoms of restlessness. She had fulfilled her mission. The possession of exclusive information raised her spirits and restored her wasted energies. She really must be going. She had only come for a minute. She would look over and stay longer another time. And so she presently tied up her strings, and hastened homewards across the fields, without one thought of the hot weather, or a single reflection on the danger of walking herself into a fever and then sitting down in a draught.

The orchards were covered with rosy apples, and the hazel bushes in the lane laden with clustering nuts. By the drang-way she met Josiah.

“The new pa’son ’ll be here Zunday wick. Sure ’tes to be hoped he’ll prove a good man.”

“Oh!” said Josiah.

At a spring in a nook of the wall at the end of the causeway old Grammer Sandboy, a copper-

complexioned, witch-like old crone of doubtful reputation, was waiting for the gurgling stream to fill her red pitcher.

“ Pa’son ’ll be here next wick.”

“ Oh ! ” said Grammer.

Cottagers stepped out of doors to catch the words, and Sutton was thrown into a fever of excitement from which it was impossible to recover for a fortnight.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRIMITIVE PASTORAL PARISH

THE fateful Sunday came at last. It was understood that the new parson was staying in the neighbourhood, had sent on a parcel by the tranter, and would ride over for the service; so the villagers strolled down to the church in good time. All the men wore "tutties" in their button-holes, and the women carried handkerchiefs and posies in their hands. They lingered around the lich-gate and the church-porch in groups, wondering what the new-comer would be like. A consensus of opinion determined that he would not be like "wold pa'son that wur gone." That was not to be expected. But no morbid pessimism prevailed in Sutton. They spoke of the new parson as hopefully as of a new potato, and confidently cherished the expectation that he would prove "a good sort."

Josiah Clarke and Abraham Bartlett, not from pride, but conscious of the state to which God had called them, stood apart from the rest conversing wisely upon the comparative quietude of the days

of their youth, and wondering when Abraham ought to boom the bell.

Then Mr. Culliford came hurrying through the “drang.” He was excited, and in contrast with his bright, brass-buttoned, blue coat, his face appeared more rosy than ever. He glanced at the group around the porch, and mysteriously beckoned Josiah and Abraham into the road.

“Zo zure as the light!” he cried, “that rascally, rick-burning fellow is a-riding down the lane at a walk, ’pon the same sorrel-coloured ho’s, wi’ a little short black rod in the han’ o’ un. Zure, he must want to pry about whilst we be to church. Unbeknown I watched the man over hedge, an’ he looked at his watch, an’ pulled up steady-like, as if he had plenty o’ time.”

“He’ll wait till the bell’s down, an’ then come in parish.”

“Or tie up his ho’s to some gate, an’ walk roun’ the grounds.”

Unconscious of the suspicion surrounding him, the rider came leisurely round the corner, tapping as usual upon the horse’s off-shoulder.

The wisdom of Sutton scanned him narrowly. He was wearing a black coat and a white clerical necktie, but he looked younger than formerly, and smiled as if in anticipation of welcome. Then he drew rein, tucked the unlawful weapon or

engine under his arm, and cordially held out his hand.

"Mr. John Culliford, I expect. I am Mr. Percival."

Quick as lightning the truth flashed upon Sutton. The faces of Josiah and Abraham became simultaneously illuminated. Yet it was a moot point for the next quarter of a century as to which brain the idea struck first, for Abraham knew it was the parson as soon as the horse came round the corner, whereas Josiah got a bit of an inkling when Mr. John Culliford first spoke. Mr. John Culliford shook hands without beaming, and with becoming dignity. He doubted whether a man responsible for such a serious mistake could possibly turn out a "good sort."

However, Mr. Percival dismounted. Josiah with alacrity led away his horse. Abraham ran full-pelt into the tower and proudly rang the three bells, a rope in each hand, whilst his right foot in a stirrup pulled the third. Mr. Culliford accompanied the clergyman to the crypt.

"I suppose the hymns are chosen?" said Mr. Percival, putting on his surplice.

"They do always choose in the gallery," explained Mr. Culliford, "four ve'se hymns, or stop at four ve'ses. An' the pa'son an' clerk do vessy the psalms for we to zing the 'Glory bes'."

“Everything will be just as usual.”

Yet although this assurance was so eminently satisfactory, Mr. Culliford felt a presentiment that all was not well. The more so when the new parson, unfolding the unlawful weapon or engine, took out a sermon neatly written at considerable length. As Mr. Culliford walked to his seat in the chancel, he reflected with discontent that ten minutes extempore is better than an hour read out.

But everything was just as usual. Except that when he recited the Apostles' Creed the new clergyman turned to the east—a piece of ritual to which Sutton had been unaccustomed.

The villagers glanced doubtfully at each other, and Mr. Culliford frowned.

But the opportunity of the parish did not occur until it was time to give out the first hymn. Then came a pause, a rustling of leaves and a tuning of musical instruments behind the red curtains on the gallery rail. Josiah rose, and with a deep sense of responsibility slowly arranged on the telegraph three figures making the number of the hymn. Abraham shaded a puckered brow with his brown hand, read and gave out,—

“Let us sing to the praise an' glory of God four ve'ses of the 243rd hymn.”

The congregation rose and turned towards the musicians, and such was the simple unanimity of

Sutton, that persons holding seats under the gallery joined in the general movement and turned their faces to the west wall. Then the curtains were thrown aside. The two instruments, a yellow flute and a dark-coloured bassoon, were revealed. And if the flute, by reason of its nimbler temperament, or carried away by keener susceptibility, ever found itself in front, it loyally waited without impatience to commence fairly on the following verse. At last they finished on a comma, with a happy sense that music was worth living for, and life complete. As Josiah drew the curtain, forgetting all tribulations as to time and tune, he whispered that "it wasn't so very dusty."

John Sandboy replied that it was "terr'ble good."

They thought only of the triumph of the performance, as people remember only the virtues of the dead.

The shock came when Mr Percival, still in his surplice, walked up the pulpit steps. Never had such a thing been seen in Sutton, and everybody cast around furtive glances to discover what other people thought. Mr. Culliford, as usual, covered his head with a red handkerchief, and gave himself up to serious reflection. The sermon ran on and on with insidious smoothness. Mr. Culliford did not understand it, but he knew the danger of

swallowing unsound doctrine unawares. Why, there is nothing on earth so honey-sweet as a Papist in disguise. Thus when church was out, the new parson gone, and the parishioners were strolling up the street, or standing in groups on the causeway, uncertain what to think, he found his ideas clearly formulated and his utterance free.

“ We don’t want no Popery to Zutton,” he cried.

“ Meäster don’t want no——”

“ I don’t call it decent o’ the pa’son to turn his back upon the people,” piped little Mrs. Carew.

“ The man turned roun’ an’ stared I straight in the face. I don’t want no Papist to stare John Culliford in the face. An’ he’s no age nother. An’ what do he want to wear a surplice in the pulpit for? I do call it scand’lous to send a bwoy like he to talk to staid volk like we. Why, he’s little more ’an just out from college. A bwoy in a bed-gown, that’s what I do call un—a bwoy in-a bed-gown. ’Tes the thin end o’ Popery, that’s what ’tes. We don’t want no Popery to Sutton. Let the Methodies have the little chapel. You can tell ’em so, Mrs. C’rew. So zoon as they be a-minded. Oh no! We don’t want no Popery here. I do hold wi’ Church an’ State. An’ I don’t grumble about tithes. But be dalled if we do want Popery. No, no——”

He turned away, too excited to stand and talk.

but as he walked up the lane, his lusty voice could still be heard denouncing Popery, and declaring his determination to "let 'em have the little chapel."

The new parson returned delighted to his friends.

Sutton, he told them, was a sweetly primitive, pastoral little place.

CHAPTER VII

THE STRANGER

DELIGHTED with her new possession, Marion Burt hung the portrait of her mother over the mantel-shelf in her bedroom, beneath an illuminated text and the sampler she had worked in childhood.

It was an increasing joy, and exercised an influence over her thought and character almost like intercourse with a human being. In the warm summer days she used to carry her work there, and the presence of the picture did away with all loneliness. It was company at night, when the village, frugal of candle-light, lay at rest ; and she would sit up looking over the letters and sermons which she had brought down from the garret.

These she read together, arranging them by their dates, and once there was a reference in the letter to the eloquence of the previous Sunday, followed by a feverish anticipation of the next.

"Then at least I shall see my dearest again," said the faded writing. *"But it seems a thousand years to then."*

The perusal of these fragments from a romance of long ago heated her imagination and engaged her sympathies. The weaving a delicate story from such slender threads moved her to tears, and affected her more deeply than the reading of any mere fiction could have done. It was true, it was real, and interwoven with the tenderest sentiments natural to her maiden heart. Her mother loomed out of the forgotten past to be near her in the solitude ; to become the heroine of her dreams, the prototype and ideal of all that her immaculate fancy could conceive of love. This mother who had loved so well, and died so soon, leaving her father to years of isolated sadness.

It seemed to Marion that if only such a passion were kindled in the soul, life must be for ever complete.

She looked upon the picture so often that every feature, every wave and turn of the ringlets, every detail of the dress became familiar—she knew it all by heart. One night, when everything was still, after her father's door was shut, and the footsteps of the maid had ceased upon the floor above, a sudden impulse prompted her to dress her hair after the manner of the portrait. It was not exactly vanity, for no one would ever see, but an outcome of the infatuation which had taken possession of her. She wanted to resemble her

mother in form, in manner, in fidelity in the face of opposition—in all, except the end so early and sad. And this aspiration was a form of worship.

She lavishly lit two large wax candles, kept on the mantel-shelf for ornament rather than use, and placed them one on either side of the looking-glass on her dressing-table. She brought the precious relic to inspire her efforts, and she unbound her long black hair, hitherto closely imprisoned in a serious plait. It fell around her neck and shoulders as if rejoicing in its new-found freedom. Hundreds of times she had seen it thus, and yet the wealth, the luxury of its beauty had never been disclosed to her before. She had never thus thought of it before. But the attempt was in no sense a success. The reluctant tresses could not readily conform to a demand so strangely unexpected, nor wreath themselves in ringlets at a moment's notice. Yet as they fell across her forehead the change was startling. The whole character of her face was altered, and she saw, with a feeling of exultation not wholly free from alarm, that the likeness to the portrait was very striking. For the first time in her life she asked herself if she were beautiful ; and the thought was a revelation to her.

Of course she had no intention to adopt any such change.

Yet why not? Her father, engrossed in his books and meditations, would probably not notice it, and there was no one else to see. So little did personal vanity enter into the question that the strength of the position lay in the possibility that the alteration might be effected unobserved. Yet there were terrors in such a new departure. She wondered would the people stare if she went thus into the street or to the little chapel over the hill.

These doubts were so real that days elapsed before she repeated the experiment; but after that she did so constantly, and with ever-increasing skill. With a little practice, a little coaxing and twirling around the forefinger, the curl became quite natural; and growing familiarised with it herself, she ceased to dread the effect of its sudden apparition upon the congregation of Upton. Yet many weeks passed, and no change was made.

One Sunday morning late in September she was standing by the open window in her bedroom. The air was fresh and sweet, for there had been rain in the night, and the scent of clove carnations arose from the garden below. Her father was walking slowly up and down the path, his head bent, his hands behind his back. Sometimes he stopped, looked at his watch, and then continued his walk.

The pervading calm lulled to rest her last re-

maining scruple. With a sudden impulse she turned to the mirror, and with excited, nervous fingers rearranged her hair in the manner now familiar to her solitude. Then her courage almost failed, and she stood in breathless hesitation.

Some stragglers from an outlying hamlet were leisurely creeping down to church. The three bells in Sutton tower began to sing their "ding, dang, dong." Then her father stopped once more and looked up towards the open window.

"Marion! Marion!" he cried.

"Yes, Father."

"I want you just one moment."

He often called her thus, sometimes to impart a thought or ask some question suggested of his meditation. Then he was ever restless until he had unburdened his mind.

"Yes, Father."

There was no help for it now. She took one final glance, returned the miniature to the mantelpiece and ran downstairs.

Her father was advancing towards the porch, as in her anxiety not to keep him waiting, she hurried into the sunlight, and flashed upon him suddenly face to face.

Haste and excitement had brought the colour to her cheek. She was a little out of breath, and her red lips were slightly parted. Her eyes looked

very large and bright. The plain simplicity of her soft grey summer attire, destitute of all adornment but the white embroidery collar, fastened with a black ribbon at her throat, heightened by contrast the vivid character of her face.

As she met her father's glance the light faded. She had believed some mild remonstrance possible, but he spoke no word of censure, nor uttered any complaint. He only looked at her with astonishment and pain, as if some sad and tender memory had been too suddenly recalled. There was a certain twitching movement around his mouth, as though he wanted to speak, but restrained himself. Then he sighed. She could have borne rebuke, but this silent reproach was unbearable. Her eyes quailed and sought the ground. To the end of life, Marion could never forget that look.

Tears came unbidden. She had pained him with this vain folly, and his patience touched her heart. In an outburst of remorse, she rushed to her room, brushed away the unhappy ringlets, and hastily restored the plait. It was the only reparation within her power.

She put on her bonnet, and joined him in the garden.

"Come, Marion, we shall be late," he said, as he held open the gate.

They walked slowly down the street in sober

silence. Such was their habit, for her father's thoughts were often far away, and she had learned never to interrupt his reverie. But to-day the absence of speech seemed unnatural. She did not venture to look, yet she could detect his disquietude. She almost wished he would find fault, and break the spell which had fallen on them. Doubtless he also was conscious of this mute constraint, for as they came in sight of the church, he asked uneasily,—

“Is it not to-night that a preacher is coming from Bridgetown?”

“Yes. He is to come this evening.”

Fears of Popery, the knowledge that two wagon-loads of seats had been hauled from Upton, and the expectation of a Boanerges from Bridgetown, were sufficient to awaken a lively interest in Sutton and the neighbourhood. People who had never wandered from their parish church, when they found that service was to be held in Mr. John Culliford's chapel, walked miles to be present on so interesting an occasion. Thus, when Mr. Burt and Marion arrived, the little building was already almost full, and chairs had been brought from the Manor Farm and placed in the alley. They seated themselves near the door. The promoters of the meeting hurried up and

down finding places for strangers until the last was provided, and everything became still. As Marion's glance wandered over the rows of alternate heads and bonnets, her thoughts retraced the events of the day. Was it only a fancy that, during their walk to the chapel, her father's manner had been even softer and more affectionate than usual? And yet in the afternoon, at the hour when they were used to read together, he had walked out upon the moor, without even telling her or asking for her company. She had watched him passing between the willow trees, and thought, with a sinking heart, how bowed and old he looked. Regarded through the transparent medium of her clear, unsullied sympathy, her little vanity, if vanity it were, assumed the distorted magnitude of a sin.

Then the chapel became abnormally still.

The hour was past, and every minute seemed alert with expectation. Then followed a fluttering and a buzzing. Heads bent over towards bonnets, and bonnets leant over towards heads in whispered conference.

Josiah rose, hastily pushed his way to the door, and went out. Without question the preacher from Bridgetown was reprehensibly late, and time was precious, because night drew on so early now. The windows were all open, and on the soft air came the sound of the clock in Sutton tower

striking the quarter past five, and still he had not come. With admirable presence of mind, a deacon from Upton gave out a hymn, to occupy and soothe the congregation. But habit had hardened their custom to a ritual, and although there were no instruments, the congregation turned unanimously to the west to sing. Then Mr. John Culliford himself went out, and made his way to a point at the top of his orchard, whence he could look over the village and see those miles of road across the moor. But nowhere was there man or horse in sight.

It was clear now that the preacher could not arrive in time. The unregenerate of that neighbourhood were likely to have the laugh over this little flock of Nonconformity.

Marion felt a touch on her shoulder, and saw that her father had risen, and was standing, anxious to pass out of the seat. He pushed his way gently between the chairs, and having whispered a few words to the deacon, ascended the small platform which was to serve as a pulpit. He had been the subject of so much surmise, that many people regarded his presence there with curiosity, not unmingled with distrust.

“ Let us pray ! ”

The congregation settled itself to listen, closely and critically. As for Marion, her eyes were

riveted upon her father. The far-away past of her infancy, of late so frequently and vividly pictured, was brought back ; and although all this was so clearly the result of accident, it seemed, in some indefinable manner, a sequence to her thoughts. Then, piercing the vague uneasiness which fluttered in her soul and disturbed her thoughts, came the voice of his prayer—always for forgiveness—forgiveness and the power to forgive. It was so real. The spirit of his abstraction, the very soul of his solitude had found a tongue. The words came straight from his heart, warm and fresh, with none of the hackneyed phrases used of all the preachers she had ever heard, whether from far or near. They possessed the vitality which springs from some living experience—some tempest which has torn the hopes of life to tatters, and left it labouring upon the waste. It was so real, she recognised instinctively the wail of a heart's agony.

Was his the need of forgiveness—or only for the strength to forgive ?

She knew his guileless life too well to think him capable of ill. And what in these years of isolation could there be to forgive ? No living being could have wronged him but herself ; and so simple was her mind that, in imagination, her sin became as deep as the fervour of his prayer. She grew

tremulous with excitement, and her heart sickened with remorse.

The congregation, too, was moved by the fervid sincerity of this unexpected preacher.

Mr. John Culliford, the parish churchwarden, whose presence was scarcely sympathetic, but only a protest against Popery, was wont, for devotional purposes, to veil his head in a red handkerchief ; but this evening he sat intent and uncovered, although the flies kept pitching on his bald crown.

And Mrs. Carew, an habitual worshipper, forgot the spasms which usually necessitated the consumption of peppermint drops, although from uncertainty about the doctrine she did not utter one appreciative groan.

In this little meeting-house the “ long prayer,” as it was called, was rarely a petition. More often it took the form of an explanation to the Almighty of the exact spiritual condition of the elect—a very subtle, intellectual exercise, exhibiting the nicest doctrinal knowledge. You could detect unsoundness in prayer with even greater certainty than in preaching.

James Burt only poured out his heart.

But perhaps the sermon might shine with more of the true light.

Because of the delay it was expedient to shorten

the service, and after the reading of a brief portion of Scripture, and the singing of a hymn, he gave out his text. The subject was the same, ever the same as the prayer—"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

His habitual diffidence just clung around and impeded his earlier sentences; and then, forgetful of the past, the people, and everything but the flood of truth surging afresh within his soul, he preached of love and forgiveness, human and Divine, with that warmth of eloquence which mankind calls inspiration.

The spirit of vacillation no longer quivered around his lips. Even the insignificance of his stature was lost in the loftiness of his spirituality. And the sun, sinking behind the moor, glowed rich and red through the hazy summer atmosphere, and gleamed aslant through the Gothic windows of the chapel, re-gilding faded armorial shields, and shedding a ruddy warmth upon the walls.

It fell on Marion's face as she sat listening in astonishment and awe. She had never seen the drama nor touched the tragedy of Life; neither had her ears ever heard words like these. Yet this sudden outburst of eloquence helped to fill in the romance she had woven around her father's early life. It redeemed his character from a certain vague ineffectuality, which even her affection could

not have denied. The latent woman within her could realize that this had won a woman's love.

The sermon was finished. Her father descended, and stood nervously at the foot of the platform. The congregation shook hands over the seats, and loitered talking, or gathered in groups in the field before the door.

“ Ay,” sighed Mrs. Culliford, “ ’twer a beautiful discou’sè, sure enough. He mus’ be a good man.”

“ But very little Gospel about un, to my mind.” objected Mrs. Carew. “ Ah, Mrs. Culliford, it may be zwit to the ear, but little to carr’ away.”

“ I do call he do preach main well,” said Mr. John Culliford.

When Marion and her father came out of the chapel, the villagers were dispersing homewards in twos and threes in the calm evening light.

The glow of sunset was fading upon ridge, and wood, and brake, and a flight of rooks was passing slowly over the hill-top. Far away in the west was a mass of livid cloud broken into vivid streaks of passionate and inconstant splendour; but the earth was steeped in a spirit of sweet contentment, and birds sang as they sometimes sing of an autumn evening in memory of the summer which is past.

James Burt laid his hand on his daughter's arm and they walked down the footpath more quickly

than was his wont. By the stile into the lane he hesitated and stopped.

"Let us walk over the hill," he said. And they turned up the familiar way they had so often trodden.

They were now free of the houses, and hidden between high hedgerows. The dim twilight of the wood before them promised a seclusion suitable for the outpouring of an overladen heart.

"Marion," he began, "it is fourteen years since I preached the Gospel of God to mortal ears. Fourteen years I have been numbed, and cold, and dumb. Then, when I preached it was half vanity and pride of heart ; and now the noon of life is past, the day is departing, and the night cometh when no man can work."

His agony of soul was pitiable ! But what could she say ? She could only press his hand tightly against her side in mute sympathy.

They had passed the gentle ascent and reached the foot of the knap, where the road winds, rough and steep, beneath the overhanging trees, yet in his excitement he only quickened his steps.

"But to-day I have received a call. If the opportunity had not been vouchsafed to me to night, I must have gone in search of it. I dare not remain longer in sloth, but must go into the vineyard. Truly the harvest is great, but the

labourers are few ; and I have loitered long in idleness, moaning over the thorns in my flesh, but forgetting the crown of scorn upon His brow ; over the aching in my heart, but heeding not His pierced side. God forgive me ! The blow was hard to bear, and I broke under it. God forgive me !"

There is a gloom of despondency so deep that consolation becomes as ineffectual as a rushlight in the open night.

"You have always been good," she murmured.

He sighed ; then moaned—the moan of that distress which is so much more terrible than any physical pain.

Then he continued more quickly, "I had been thinking to-day that we must go back into the world. The years have fled, and perhaps the past is forgotten. But the vacant pulpit to-night was like a call to me. It came like an answer to my secret thoughts, and I felt the finger of God in it. I will offer myself to these people. I will minister to them freely. I will go to-morrow and—I say, I will go to-morrow and—and——"

They had reached the open ground above the wood, where the road runs along the hill-top. The moon, full and clear, was rising, although the last gleam of day had not departed. By the road-side was a square pile of stone as yet unbroken, and he staggered towards it and sat down.

"Father! What is it? Are you ill?"

"I am overcome—overcome."

He could scarcely answer, but leant forward gasping for breath, his head resting on his hands.

"You have walked too fast," she lamented.

Then he leant back upon the stones and did not move.

The gleam vanished from the clouds, the glow of sunset faded from the sky. There is a moment when the darkness seems to make a sudden stride, and the earth feels unspeakably lonely in the still dim light. The sheep-dog at the Manor Farm was barking. An owl was hooting away across the moor. The gorse upon the hill-top stood out rigid and black like a blot upon the night.

With difficulty Marion raised her father's head and placed it upon her lap. His breathing was now scarcely perceptible, and he gave no answer to her imploring cries. In her helplessness she called for help. But no response came out of the dusk. Knowing well the frugal habits of the villagers, who scarcely lighted a candle when the days were long, the thought flashed across her mind that no one would pass that way. What could she do? Her courage sank under the heavy fear that her father was dying. She must get assistance. And yet she dared not leave him to go in search of help.

The intensity of her emotion made the moments seem like hours. At last in the distance she became aware of a dull thudding sound. She listened, scarcely able to distinguish it from the throbbing of her heart. Then a distant rider turned his horse off the wayside sward, and she could distinctly hear the beating of hoofs sharp and clear upon the road. She called for help ; then listened again. The pace broke into a gallop, and a minute later a horseman had pulled up in the road beside her.

“What is it?” he asked eagerly. He vaulted from the saddle, and securing the rein under the stirrup-leather, came forward to her assistance.

In her relief at this unexpected aid, tears choked her utterance, and she could scarcely find a voice to give the necessary explanation. Yet, in spite of her agitation, every detail of the incident became impressed for ever on her memory.

Without hesitation the stranger deftly loosened collar and neck-cloth, and taking from his pocket a flask, held it to the lips of the prostrate man, who presently raised his head and gasped.

“Ha! That did you good, eh? Now a little more.” Then he turned to Marion. “He will be all right in a moment. He has only fainted. But what has he been doing? Down to Mr. John Culliford’s to chapel—over-excited himself—hurried up the hill to be home to Upton before dark.

Mustn't do that sort of thing now. Elderly gentleman,—out of condition,—mustn't put on the pace."

His careless manner reassured her. It would have been impossible to speak thus lightly in the presence of real danger ; moreover his surmises, so carelessly uttered, were nearly correct.

"We are not going to Upton," she explained. "We live in Sutton, and were simply taking a walk. I do not know how to thank you——"

"Please don't try," he interrupted. In the dusk he had believed them village people, but now his tone was quite respectful. "I am very glad I happened to pass. I am going to Mr. Culliford's, and will wait and help you if you will allow me to do so."

Her gratitude was beyond expression, even if she could have found words. He had come like an angel of mercy out of the gloom and saved her father's life. Even in the dim light she knew that he was young, and there crept into her heart an intuition, never to be explained, but never forgotten, which linked him with her life. She could only murmur acceptance of his offer, and nothing relieved the silence but her father's returning respiration, and the horse contentedly cropping the roadside grass.

The stranger's prediction was quickly verified. A little later her father was sufficiently restored to

sit up and think of returning home. The stranger fetched his horse, threw the bridle over his arm and assisted the patient to rise. They then descended the hill through the wood together, Marion on one side of her father and he on the other, with the horse nervously holding back and sometimes stumbling in the uncertain light. After the hollow the open lane seemed quite light. The stranger began to talk quite freely.

"I am going to stay some time with Mr. Culliford. What a fine old house it is! And what a thoroughly right-hearted, wrong-headed man. He has let the Nonconformists have the old Beauchamp Chapel. A desecration, no doubt. But I cannot help laughing."

He had readily discarded his first idea that they were Dissenters; but at such levity Marion felt her father wince, although he made no comment.

"I am deeply indebted to you, Sir. But I am unacquainted with my benefactor," said Mr. Burt, stopping as they reached the village.

"Oh, my name is Hensley. But I will see you safely home."

At the garden gate, with a renewal of thanks, they parted.

"I hope I may soon see you again," said Mr Hensley, as he shook hands with Marion. Then he mounted his horse and rode away.

CHAPTER VIII

GRAMMER'S PITCHERS

MR. PERCIVAL preached three Sundays before he came to live at Sutton, and the service in the chapel took place a week earlier than that event. He at once proceeded to call upon all his parishioners, passing from door to door with a systematic ardour never before witnessed in that neighbourhood. These attentions should doubtless have endeared him to his flock, for his manners were quite simple and kindly, but for the unfortunate suspicion under which he laboured. There lived in Sutton one old man at least who, before his memory failed, could remember having known in youth another old man who had seen the hangings and horrors of the "Duking days" as they used to call the time of Monmouth's rebellion. Fearful tales were still told over the wood fire of a winter night, and lost nothing either by repetition or antiquity. Sutton was as firmly convinced now as then that it did not want any Popery, and such unprecedented zeal could not fail to awaken the deepest distrust. Papists were known to be zealous, but

never before had Sutton felt cause of complaint. Well-to-do people questioned the wisdom of thus currying favour with the poor, and the humble doubted in their hearts the dignity of so much demonstration.

As Mrs. Culliford said to Mrs. Carew, “Twenty minutes by Zutton clock, so Meäster have a-heard, did he stay in the Sandboys’ cottage, but only fourteen to Josiah Clarke’s. To my mind a pa’son should keep hiszelf for the Zunday, an’ not be hindering folk wi’ their work.”

“Why, ’tes out o’ one door into another all up street, as Abraham said, ‘more like a rabbit wi’ a stoat to his tail or a Johnny Fortnight than a pa’son.’ I don’t call that religion myself. Why, all the years poor wold pa’son lived in Zutton, an’ always so much liked, an’ so pleasant to stop an’ speak, you never knew un visit nor so much as darken the door, ’ithout you were ’pon the point o’ death or some other good reason. Do really make a body doubtful,” said Mrs. Carew.

It was early in October when Mr. Percival called upon the Burts, the white house being the last dwelling in the parish. From the study window Marion and her father watched his approach. Never before had she known a formal visitor, nor any whose errand might not easily be divined ; and this intrusion upon their retirement (as at first it

seemed) of an able-bodied, active young cleric in a soft hat and coat of impressive length and straightness of cut, caused their simple hearts to flutter with alarm. His rat-ta-tat upon the door sounded as appalling as a threat of invasion.

But doubts were quickly dispelled under the influence of his genial presence. He was in the first warm flush of life, recently presented to an excellent living, and his heart was overflowing with delight—with his church, with his people, with his parish. He was certain that he should get on excellently well in Sutton. He already loved the place. And everybody came to church. In so far as he could judge on Sunday morning last not one was absent.

"There is only one thing," he said, suddenly becoming grave. "The strange way in which, when singing, the congregation turns to the west. When I am better known, and have gained the confidence of the people, I must alter that. But I do not anticipate any difficulty. Everybody seems so delightfully simple-minded and sincere."

Mr. Burt lifted his mild grey eyes to gaze upon the visitor. The sympathy between Marion and her father was so close that she could feel the doubt he hesitated to express. The frankness of the clergyman laid on his tender conscience the duty of open speech.

"Yes. They are very quiet folk," he began.

"And there is no dissent—at least, no antagonism of dissent," continued Mr. Percival. "I understand there is a chapel at Upton, and that people go there from Sutton of a summer evening. But I shall have an evening service. That will allure them from these by-paths of Nonconformity."

For the pure sensibility, which so often looks like cowardice, there is no compromise with conscience, and there was no time to lose, for Mr. Percival had risen to depart.

"Occasionally they hold services at the Manor Chapel," said Mr. Burt quickly. "I have myself helped them—preached for them, in fact."

A scarcely perceptible expression of vexation, like the fleeting shadow of a spring cloud, flitted over Mr. Percival's face. Then, as he held out his hand, he said pleasantly,—

"I hope you will both help me. And if at any time I can be of use, pray regard me as a friend."

Marion led him to the door. The wild honeysuckle twining over the porch was still in flower, and he loitered a moment, asking questions about the garden and the plants that thrive in Sutton. Fascinated by the subject, she walked with him to the gate to point out the row of tall hollyhocks and the clustering nuts upon the filbert tree.

The street was empty, except for old Grammer

Sandboy returning with her two red pitchers from the well. She put them down upon the road and rested, for the old soul had seen her three-score years and ten. Seeing the parson, she picked them up and hurried along, with a deep respect for quality, a recollection of the industry of her youth, and an eye to future alms.

Marion stood awhile by the gate to watch Mr. Percival striding down the street. The novelty of a visitor had proved quite delightful, and she felt all the charm of his pleasant manners and airy, easy ways. It was impossible not to like him, she thought.

Then an accident happened, full of quaint pathos to those who saw it. The story is still related in Sutton, and if people laugh—what then? It is they who bring the laughter, for at the time there were tears.

The parson strode along, pre-occupied and in haste.

Grammer toiled homewards beneath her weight of years and pitchers.

As they met, the parson, for a moment interrupting his thought, looked up, nodded to the old lady with unexpected friendliness and passed on.

Grammer, in the glowing warmth of her gratification, curtsied—the old-fashioned, lowly curtsey of her youth.

And something happened. The handles were still in her hands, the lips remained unbroken, yet the pitchers were in pieces, and on either side water was dripping from her skirt.

She uttered no exclamation of astonishment or lament. She only stared at the shining potsherds at her feet and the great water-stains upon the dusty road. Long before she realized the cause of her calamity the parson was out of sight. And when Marion ran down to offer consolation or assistance, the old woman was still clutching the useless handles, whilst tears ran down her wrinkled cheeks. At the first word of sympathy, she fell to picking up the sherds, and putting them in her apron with a sort of broken-hearted affection.

Neither took heed of a horseman riding slowly through the village, until he drew rein to shake hands with Marion, glanced at the old woman, and laughed.

“ Why, what’s the matter, Mother ? ”

“ I’ve a-curchied the bottoms o’ ’em out—both to once,” she sobbed.

In a moment Mr. Hensley’s hand was in his pocket, and a coin glittered in the old woman’s hollow palm. “ Bless your honour ! Bless your honour’s handsome face,” she cried, as, astonished at the munificence of the gift, she hobbled off to the cottage.

"Wicked-looking old witch," he laughed.

It sounded strange to Marion Burt, this rapid transition from sympathy to contempt, but he had already dismissed both emotions.

"I was coming to inquire for your father," he said.

"He will be glad to see you," she replied warmly. "He—we have spoken of you several times. He has blamed himself for not writing a note to thank you——"

"Not at all. I have been thinking of you, too, and looking forward to seeing you again."

In his voice was a strange caressing quality, quite new to her, and as their eyes met, she glanced away and walked on, looking upon the ground. Since her father's illness the daily walks had become irregular, and were often given up altogether. Tired of the house, Marion busied herself in the garden, and sometimes made solitary excursions upon the moor. But constantly the recollection of this man had taken possession of her loneliness. With never-varying flight, like birds of passage, her thoughts unerringly sped to a far-off land of romance. She did not take them for reality, these fancies wherein moved a stranger once dimly seen in the twilight, but she revelled in them with a wild unrest. And now his manner carried on the dream. The colour mounted to her cheek. She

could have cried with vexation at her inability to conceal her blushes.

“ I begin to like Sutton,” he went on. “ I thought just now I should never be able to stand it. I’ve knocked about a great deal and seen a variety of life. I began to yearn for primitive simplicity, and Mr. Poltimore recommended me to Mr. Culliford. He certainly seems likely to provide it. I like the people and the place. I came under the impression that I might learn some farming, and I still cherish the hallucination.”

Even in the first sentence, Marion detected a levity hitherto unknown and quite incomprehensible. He laughed gaily—at what she could scarcely tell—at his own ineffectuality, and, as it seemed, at the fully-recognised folly of learning farming of Mr. John Culliford. To speak of a serious step in life as merely of another act in a comedy, sounded strange to one who could bring a keen and nervous interest to the identification of a herb. Yet the gaiety was infectious, and she laughed also.

The Sandboy family, all who could run, came swarming through the garden-hatch. Even the old man stood up, and the last baby was at Mrs. Sandboy’s breast. To break two pitchers with one bob, and without loss of property, was a very interesting incident ; and there were the sherds and

stains of water on the road, sure enough. Aware of preternatural activity, Mrs. Carew peeped from the window. Mrs. Clarke ran into the street. John Sandboy was by to take the horse, and Mr. Hensley dismounted and walked by Marion's side.

"Lawk-a-daisy!" ejaculated Mrs. Sandboy with a laugh. "Why, the maid have a-picked up a young man!"

"An' I hope she have wi' all my heart," responded Mrs. Clarke, a well-to-do matron without the slightest desire to favour monopoly.

But Marion did not hear these comments. She was listening with undivided attention to Mr. Hensley.

"I never see you anywhere. Where do you hide yourself all the time?"

"We have not been out since—since that night. My father has walked to Bridgetown to the doctor several times. He seems disinclined to go out, but he feels he must do that."

"But why does he walk? Mr. Culliford shall drive him. He constantly goes in. He shall let you know. I will arrange it."

"I should be very glad, but——"

"Or I'll get the cart and drive him myself. No, I won't do that, because it is not suitable for a lady. I shall stay in Sutton, and see if you go for

a walk. Then I shall come and talk to you. You used always to go over the hill, they say. But you have never been there since I knew you."

"How do you know?"

"You will see. The first time you come I shall be there."

She laughed a little incredulously.

"I'll bet you what you like—I mean—a woman's noblest virtue is her curiosity. You will be compelled to come to prove me, and so I shall talk to you again."

But they had reached the gate. "Here is my father," said Marion.

Mr. Burt had put on his hat and was walking slowly down the path, tapping the gravel with his stick. His face was troubled, for his conscience could not rest. Ought he to have spoken more frankly to the clergyman? To have told him that Sutton was not quite Paradise, and that ceremonial and a spotless surplice were frightening the flock? He was so deeply absorbed that at first he did not notice Marion's companion.

"Mr. Hensley has come to see you, Father," she said quietly.

Awakened from his reverie, he looked up quickly, and hurried towards the gate.

"But you were going out, Mr. Burt. I will come at some more convenient time."

"Not immediately. You observe my daughter is not ready."

"I will not interfere with your plans."

They stood in the garden talking, whilst Marion went indoors. In the twilight the other night, and now in the confusion of her inexperience, she had been unable to calmly notice Mr. Hensley. From an upstairs window she looked out at them. How tall and strong he looked beside her father. His hair was light, his features even, and his complexion tanned by a foreign sun. He wore only a moustache, a distinction in those days, and he was still talking with the same irresponsible gaiety. When she rejoined them, they walked together to the Sand-boy cottage, where he mounted his horse and rode away. Did he press her hand as they said "Good-bye"? Or was it only fancy? She could scarcely tell.

The walk over the hill that afternoon was more than usually quiet. Above the copse they stood awhile to rest and look across the moor. This wide expanse of open country had often brought quietude to James Burt, soothing his spirit and refreshing his soul like a sight of the sea. But they did not talk. The distant hills never looked so clear as beneath the early autumn cloud, and the Bristol Channel like a streak of silver gleamed above the opening of the moor.

Yet Marion did not notice these delights. Of the fantastic romance of her solitude another chapter had opened ; and she longed to be at home with no company but the treasured miniature of her mother. In her fervid imagination, like a superstition having for awhile the force of truth, arose the idea that that man was sent to Sutton—sent by Providence, out of infinite love, to satisfy the yearning of her soul.

Already, from slender materials, her busy mind was creating an ideal.

How kind he was—how promptly generous in his bounty to Grammer Sandboy ! How frank and gay in his self-disparagement ! How thoughtful about her father riding to Bridgetown ! How considerate at the gate !

With a thrill of joy she remembered his assurance that they must meet again.

CHAPTER IX

CHEE-HALO! HALO!

THE Sandboy cottage was one of the most picturesque features of Sutton: it possessed so richly that quality of quaint homeliness which belongs to a home-made thing. In front, a clipped box hedge, and a lilac-bush hanging over a hatch roughly put together from old apple poles. Half a dozen flags lying apart, more like stepping-stones than a pavement, led to the ever-open door; and below the window, on the left hand side, stood a row of bee-butts, capped with hackles of yellow reed. On the right hand side, in the open air, sat old John Sandboy, in his black chair with the shining arms.

He was the patriarch of Sutton, and the founder of the Sandboy family.

More than half a century before, he settled on the strip of wayside waste and built himself a wooden hut. Nobody interfered. The man was a character in his way, "but still, for all that," as everybody admitted, "so handy as a gimlet." When he enclosed the land all the neighbours

laughed. When he put up the cottage Sutton was filled with admiration. As folks agreed, "If John Sandboy could only bide there forty year an' pay noo rent, the lan' 'ud be his." "Ay! Ay!" retorted the Mr. John Culliford of that day. "An' if you was to zit 'pon my gate-post forty year an' pay noo rent, the gate 'ud be yours." So impracticable did the thing seem! Yet not a soul said a word, and the miracle came to pass. Quite a tall pear tree spread over the pointing-end; the front was covered with creepers, and no rent had ever been paid.

There were four generations of Sandboys.

There was Johnny in his little smock, John in his fustian jacket, Gramfer in the graveyard, and "the wold man."

Johnny called him "Girt-gran-dadder."

This Sutton Methuselah was nearly a hundred years of age, and could neither walk far nor talk much without coughing. But for all day long in summer, and in winter when there was a gleam of sun, they used to move his arm-chair into the open air, and there he sat alternately blinking and dozing for hours. The bees buzzed round his head, but none ever stung Girt-gran-dadder, for bees are gifted with a most delicate discrimination. Some they love and trust, and others they hate, like mere ordinary Christians. Thus when the swarm pitched

that summer in the currant bush in the corner, Grammer took them up by the double handful, and scraped them into the butt without a single sting ; whereas for John Sandboy to “show his nose a-nighst the butts wer’ a’most so much as his life wer’ wo’t’h.” Ah! Grammer understood the bees and all their mysteries. And Grammer was thoughtful of late, although she said nothing, for when the currant bough had bent, the swarm touched the ground. Grammer felt doubtful in her heart. Was it for her or for Girt-gran-dadder?

The old man’s grey hose slanted beneath the chair ; his grey head went nodding upon his chest, and he seemed, as it were, to be shrinking into himself like a concertina laid aside when the tune is done.

Then Johnny used to creep up and lay his hand upon the knee of the old corduroy breeches. At the touch of the quick life of the child, Girt-gran-dadder would re-open like a sea-anemone when a warm current passes over it. He became radiant—began to throw out tentacles—stories of his youth, recollections long hidden in his memory of the feast, the fair, the cudgel-playing, and the coronation of King George. But above all of the fool ! A particular fool in spangles, who turned somersaults and performed antics nearly fourscore years ago, on the stage in front of a travelling show.

Ha ! ha ! A chuckle-headed fool who mistook a fat sow for his sweetheart. Girt-gran-dadder declared it was almost the death of him ; and then he laughed, and coughed, and laughed again, until there was imminent danger that it might be so after all. Then subsiding into seriousness, he lamented with mingled scorn and sadness that “ there be noo fools now.”

This story exercised a fascination over Johnny, so that he always asked :—

“ Girt-gran-dadder, do ee tell up about the fool.”

“ ‘Tes a’most time the bwoy wer’ to work,” they kept saying many times a day, in various tones of expostulation, indignation and conviction. But nothing was done until the plough-ground on the hill-side below the copse, having been summer-fallowed, was put to winter wheat. Then Mr. John Culliford rode down the village tapping his grey cob’s shoulder with a ground-ash stick, and drew up before the Sandboys’ hatch. The boy was sitting on the doorstep blowing gruesome noises from a cow’s horn,

“ Odds bobs ! ” cried farmer John Culliford. “ Here’s a fine musicker. Come on, bwoy. Come on to once. Let’s hear thee zing. Let’s hear thee holla.”

To bask in the sunshine of Mr. Culliford’s

humour the household swarmed out of doors, all the four generations grinning from ear to ear, for mirth was the heritage of a Sandboy.

But Johnny blushed and was silent.

“Dostn’ hear? Let’s hear thee holla,” commanded his father.

“Chee halo! Halo! Halo!
Chee halo! Ha-lo-loy!”

“Capical,” cried Mr. John Culliford.

So Johnny was engaged to go a-bird-keeping on the hill-side. Of three bits of wood and a boot-lace his father made him a clapper, and Mr. Culliford provided a rusty old flint-lock pistol, which rarely went off. Then from daylight to dark-night, up the lane, through the copse, and on the hill-top, you heard the blearing of the horn, the rattle of the clapper, and the constantly repeated chant:—

“Chee halo! Halo! Halo!
Chee halo! Ha-lo-loy!”

The sea-fog, cold and penetrating, came rolling up the moor, then a rain, fine and drizzling, which wetted the boy to the skin, and a wind driving the last yellow leaf from the elm trees. With an inherited genius for building, Johnny made himself a hut of hurdles under the lee of a high beech hedge, and thatched it over with sedge. Then he gathered dead sticks to light a fire, and

grey smoke went eddying and drifting across the red field.

By his own fireside the boy was as well off as many another householder—or would have been, had only the rooks stayed away. But the birds found Johnny out and returned with the persistency of tax-collectors. As often as he succeeded in firing his pistol, they rose slowly to the bare ash tree in the corner and cawed, like Convocation discussing Disestablishment. As to the horn, although classical music sounded a little strange at first, no sooner did they understand it than they would fly miles and miles to listen.

So Johnny's time was occupied in running from one end of the field to the other, but when he was going east they pitched on the western side, and in the morning when he ran west, wise rooks came from the east in myriads and partially obscured the rising sun. Without avail he hopped over the clods in boots made especially for that purpose, but nothing less than wings could have supplied the necessary speed, and these were denied the inhabitants of Sutton for the present.

As invariably happens to young housekeepers, responsibilities increased.

Bird-keeping is no more the joke it seems than bringing up a family, and sharpens the wits to an equally incredible degree.

So Johnny conceived the brilliant idea of making a mommet.

With a pair of Mr. John Culliford's worn-out breeches, a discarded hunting coat, and above all, the inestimable treasure of an old clerical hat hung on a mop-stem, with a broken hay-rake for arms, he set up a fine figure of a man, and no mistake. There it stood boldly fluttering on the sloping arable ground in full view of all the village.

“Why, if our Johnny ha'n't a-put up a mommet,” cried Grammer in great delight. “Now, do let's goo an' tell his Girt-gran-dadder.”

But the sleepy old man scarcely understood, for he apprehensively replied :—

“Drat the bwoy, then. Have hur now?” And then, with an ever-vivid recollection of a youth when folly was still extant, he added, “There, bwoys must be bwoys—must be bwoys.”

Throughout that day, no Sandboy went in or out of the cottage door without yielding to an irresistible impulse to tell Girt-gran-dadder, so that the matter became serious, and the old man stayed awake constantly muttering :—

“Bless my heart! Drat the bwoy! Dear, dear, then!”

Finding the information imperfectly comprehended, they made him stand up, and pointed out the scarecrow with praiseworthy persistence. But

the patriarch, looking in a wrong direction, only blinked and quavered, “Mind! his father sha’n’t beat un for it—sha’n’t beat un for it. No, no!”

John Sandboy came home at dark with a nitch of sticks to his back, and the family was sitting round a blazing fire when Johnny lifted the latch that night. Everybody bubbled over with praise, and his mother put an extra “tatie” in his “taysaacer.” But the old man, with a dim idea of affording protection, beckoned the child to stand between his knees.

“What have ’ee a-bin up to?” he whispered shyly.

“I’ve a-made a vine mommet, Girt-gran-dadder.”

“Eh? Mommet?”

It was wonderful sometimes how well the patriarch could hear.

“Ay. A mommet, Girt-gran-dadder.”

A magic of reminiscence lingered in the word. The old man’s features relaxed into a grin, and then he chuckled as if in recollection of the fool.

But Johnny did not laugh. In spite of success and popularity with its attendant potato, the soul within that little smock remained unsatisfied. The bright joy begotten of this first attempt at creative art faded beneath a clearer perception of the imperfection of the creation.

“But, Girt-gran-dadder, he ha’n’t a-got noo head.”

The old man nodded from doubt and palsy. He stared at the blazing sticks and said nothing ; but perhaps, like many a silent person, thought the more.

On the following day at noon, the inhabitants of Sutton could scarcely believe their eyes. For upwards of two years Girt-gran-dadder had never passed beyond the garden-hatch, never been to church, nor even walked so far as the White Hart. Now Mrs. Carew, peering out of her front window, saw the old man travelling down the street on his tottering legs and two sticks, with truly marvellous expedition. Once he looked back as if in dread of pursuit—then on again with renewed vigour. Abraham Bartlett, standing on the causeway, shouted after him in vain. The old man was as deaf as an adder that morning. But he knew well enough where he was going, and turned into the drang-way with quite unseemly haste for a man of his years. As Mrs. Culliford afterwards said to Mrs. Carew, “An’ I had but jus’ a-got over stile when I clapped eyes on the old man ; an’ really to see how he was a-putten his best foot avore up thik lane, an’ one lag in the grave too, so to speak, did put me all to a trem’le. For I couldn’ think what thought he might ha’

got in the silly old head o' un. But he oped the gate into corn-ground, an' I thought to myself, 'There's never a pit, is there?' An' I thought 'No,' and then I walked on."

The sun had passed over the copse when Johnny in his hut of hurdles looked up from his bit o' nunch. A solitary rook croaked discontentedly from the ash tree ; and there in the middle of the field stood Girt-gran-dadder, face to face with the mommet ! The mommet was leaning aslant toward the old man, the old man bent forward toward the mommet, and they looked like a couple of friends, each lamenting the other's ailments.

The boy ran eagerly across the field.

The old man having by this time recovered breath, spoke like an oracle.

" Ay, bwoy. Wi' sich a vine hat there's noo call vor a head—noo call vor a head."

And having delivered this summary of a century's experience, the old heathen turned to undertake his difficult homeward walk.

The rook on the ash tree spread his glossy wings to the sunshine, and dropped into the distant corner of the field.

" Chee ha-lo ! Ha-lo ! Ha-lo !
Chee ha-lo ! Ha-lo-loy !"

CHAPTER X

AN OLD HYMN AND A NEW BOOK

AN echo of the distant cry of "Church in danger" had indeed been heard in Sutton, but without awakening any lively fear or apprehension. Seated on the uppestock by the Manor Farm gate, or standing by the porch of the White Hart, Tranter Coombs had discoursed wisely and at length upon the evils of Catholic Emancipation, and the consequent downfall of the English nation. Sutton swallowed these predictions with open-mouthed wonder. Mr. John Culliford did not hold with this-here pandering to Popery. But all such considerations sank into insignificance in comparison with the prophecies in that year's almanac. The growth of Popery and decline of the British constitution are of little importance when you consider the weather and the practical import of the waxing and waning of the moon.

But poor old parson was alive in those days, and Sutton was a happy place. A hearty old bachelor and not over particular about tithe, once a year, as soon as convenient after harvest-home, he invited

the village worthies to dinner—a boiled leg of mutton and turnips, and after that a bowl of punch. It was the most important religious ceremony of the year. For they talked about what they were going to do, please God, and which grounds they allotted to put to wheat, and what was fair to pay. And so they agreed, and staggered home in the dark or the moonlight very well satisfied with each other. Thus in Sutton never a sheaf was paid in kind, and the parsonage possessed neither a barn nor a granary.

Then think of Abraham Bartlett. What an admirable clerk! Not for twenty miles round could be found a parish officer so experienced, so efficient, and so intelligent. He was sexton as well as clerk. But no matter what he was doing—whether opening a door when the air was sultry, shutting a window when the rain beat in, clouting the head of a boy who surreptitiously conveyed an apple to his mouth under the cloak of prayer, or awakening a worshipper prematurely overtaken by drowsiness—never had Abraham been known to lose his presence of mind or omit one single response.

So implicitly could the parish trust him that they did not need to answer for themselves. From the gloom beneath the gallery, or passing under the slanting shaft of sunlight falling from the south

windows, wherever Abraham might happen to be, just in the nick of time joined in his sonorous bass chanting the appropriate "Amen."

"You do drop your Amens about church pretty well," said Mr. John Culliford one day as they walked up the street together.

"Ay!" replied Abraham, frankly accepting the compliment, but modestly disclaiming superior talent. "'Tis all use, Mr. Culliford. 'Tis all use, Zir."

During the interval of repose occupied by the sermon, of an autumn morning when the door was open wide, Abraham used to step into the churchyard, and seat himself upon a gravestone. From this advantageous position he could gaze upon his own homestead with the square orchard running up the hill-side. No rascally Upton hobbledehoy, half man and half boy, was ever known to break the Sabbath by stealing the apples of Abraham Bartlett. Also through the window he could hear the parson's voice, soothing and softly indistinct. It was impossible to catch the words. Yet such the unerring instinct of this great man, he had never failed to walk on tiptoe up the nave in full time for the final hymn.

Sutton did not delight in change, and when everything was so eminently satisfactory, not to leave well alone seemed to Mr. John Culliford little

short of crime. The first six weeks of Mr. Percival's incumbency passed in perfect quietude. Every one was silently respectful, and he had neither suspicion nor foreboding of ill-will.

Then seeing there was a goodish bite of grass in the churchyard, by virtue of a privilege exercised for years, Abraham Bartlett turned in three calves, four little heifers, a sow and ten little pigs to eat it down. A ragged-looking lot of beasts of all sizes, they trampled over the graves, rubbed themselves against the tombstones, and sheltered from inclement weather in the porch. To judge by its various and nondescript population, the little churchyard might have been the village pound.

Thus commenced that feud between the parson and the parish which, although of brief continuance, stirred the soul of Sutton to its profoundest depths.

Mr. Percival, picking his way between the puddles on the well-worn causeway stones, looked up to find a white-faced heifer placidly gazing at him over the low churchyard wall. He stopped to return the compliment and to look at the cow. Then he became aware of the herd, noticed the deep hoof-marks on the sodden turf, and the presence of the swine. Perhaps the fence dividing the graveyard from the adjacent field might be in disrepair. But no! He walked around on a tour

of careful inspection without finding any sufficient gap. So he went to make inquiries of the sexton.

Abraham Bartlett, good, industrious man, was that morning at home. A gale, which drove Johnny to his hut of hurdles, had stripped the thatch from one side of a barley-mow in his barton, and Abraham was mounted on the stack laying a few hurdles on the thatch as a temporary expedient. From this commanding position he caught sight of the parson walking towards his house.

As Mr. Percival came into the barton Abraham prepared to descend.

“Don’t trouble to come down, Mr. Bartlett. I only wanted to ask a question.”

To the end of his life Abraham never tired of affirming that up to that time he had felt no ill-will towards Mr. Percival. As a lawfully appointed double-barrelled parish officer, with a freehold both in sextonship and clerkship, the bent of Abraham’s mind was to uphold authority and support the Church. He lent no ear to the parish gossip, nor suffered any deep fear of Popery, so long as it pleased God to spare him to be parish clerk. But no sooner did Abraham set eyes on Mr. Percival that morning, than he detected something unsound and revolutionary. “He could zee,” he said, “that the man had a-comed wi’ zomethen in the head

o' un." This perception afterwards deeply influenced Abraham's opinion in the matter of the new hymn-book.

"Don't trouble. What cattle are those in the churchyard?"

"'T'es all right, Zir. 'T'es only a few young stock I put there myself."

Although not approving of the inquisitiveness of the question, Abraham's tone was deferential, but his voice was loud, and as the mow-barton lay against the road, he could be heard in the parish almost as clearly as when he gave the responses in church. Little Mrs. Carew, ever alert, stealthily opened her front door on the opposite side of the street, and popped out into the porch.

"They make the place untidy," said the parson. "I do not like to see animals in the graveyard."

"I do take 'em out a Saturday night. An' I never didn' hear no complaint," interposed Abraham doggedly.

"They make the paths dirty," said the parson.

"They be as God made 'em," responded the clerk.

The parson began to stand upon his dignity.

"They must be removed as soon as you can fetch them away. I do not know that I should object to a few sheep just to eat off the grass—but nothing else, Bartlett, nothing else."

"But the clerk o' Zutton have a'ways a-had the kip o' the chichyard. 'T'es the custom o' the place. Hard upon thirty year have I a-bin clerk o' Zutton, an' a'ways a God-fearing man, an' never sick nor sorry, but a'ways to my church, an' never missed a Zunday since I virst said 'Amen' to wold parson Dangerfield, 'pon Motheren-Zunday in the year one——"

Unable to cope with this torrent of words, and having clearly expressed his determination, Mr. Percival hurried up the street. The sound of voices had brought Josiah Clarke to the bottom of the orchard abutting upon Abraham's mow-barton. The Sandboys also had hurried down to the hatch, and by good-hap just then Mr. John Culliford came ambling by on his cob. So the parish was opportunely gathered in impromptu committee.

Abraham turned to drive a spar into the thatch.

"Ay! An' my vather avore me thirty year, an' never a word zaid——"

"Nine-an'-twenty year by the tombstone, werden it?" interposed Josiah from over the hedge "An' 'eet you mid zay thirty, to be zure, in a manner o' spoken."

"What is it? What is it, Abraham Bartlett?" cried Mr. John Culliford, reining in his cob.

In his growing excitement Abraham waxed

oratorical. Time-honoured similes and tropes fell from his lips without effort, like acorns from an autumn oak agitated by the east wind. He did not invent, but inherited these wondrous figures of speech, which he held in common with all the country-side.

"Why, he walked up street so big as a house, an' comed in barton so straight as a arrow. An' he says, 'Don't trouble, Mr. Bartlett,' zays he, so zoft as silk, 'but whose beastezes be they in chichyard?' An' I zeed the man had a maggot in the head o' un; but I never thought no more'n the dead, an' I zaid to once there right, "'Tes so right as rain, Zir,' zes I, "'Tes my beastezes sure 'nough, that's whose 'tes.' An' he turned 'pon I like a roaren lion, an' he zaid, 'Take 'em away,' so he zaid, 'Take 'em away. I 'oon't have no beastezes in chichyard.' An' avore I could turn roun' an' catch hold o' hurdle to c'llect my thoughts, he'd a-turned tail so shuttle as a rabbit, an' nipt off down street 's if the church had a-bin a-vire."

"He never ha'n't a-breathed a word to the churchwarden," cried Mr. John Culliford indignantly.

"He do want to take it all into his own han's. That's what 'tes so sure as the light. But he ca'n't do it. He ca'n't do it by law, you mid depen,' Mr. John Culliford. Why, 'tes up zixty year we've

a-had the kip o' the chichyard in our family, an' he ca'n't come an' turn out my beastezes by word o' mouth, n'eet put 'em unbeknowed in poun' so long as I be the hayward. Tidden right—an' tidden reason. Noo doubt 't wer a-tookt in in th' app'intment. Why, ther's noo man 'pon earth do dare to meddle wi' a parish clerk. A bishop don't dare to do it. He's so good as a pa'son there. Once a-put in you ca'n't move un. You ca'n't make no change——”

“We don't want no change to Zutton. An' what's all this here talk about a new hymn-book? We don't want no new hymn-book. I tell ee what 'tes, he's nothen but a bwoy. He ha'n't zeed enough o' the wordle to understan' Zutton. He ha'n't a-got age enough vor volk a bit staid an' thoughtful. 'Tes all this here change is the ruination o' theäs country; an' I ben't a-gwain to ope my mouth out o' a new hymn-book, so long as my name's John Culliford.”

“An' I'll be danged then if I do flutey out o' un,” cried Josiah from over the hedge.

“Why, he've a-bespoke a score to put about church for next Zunday. An' he's a-minded to choose the hymns hiszelf,” explained Abraham.

“Ay, an' bring in Popery atwixt the two forrels o' 'em avore you do know where you be.”

Then Mr. Culliford, touching up his cob with

his ground-ash stick, rode slowly off to his arable field. Josiah went back into his orchard, Abraham turned to his thatching, and the Sandboys, entitled by their social position to listen but not to talk, dispersed on their various errands. For Sutton was slowly industrious in those days, and reserved prolonged conversation for moments of leisure over the wood fire and cider-cup. But the repugnance to this startling innovation did not decrease. Sutton people possessed a quaint shrewdness which perceived the impregnability of their position. They need not sing ; for as Mrs. Culliford said to Mrs. Carew, "You mid lead a horse to the water, but no power 'pon earth can make un drink."

Mr. Percival, recognising the danger of argument, went away fully aware that Abraham might give him trouble. But he quickly dismissed the thought. Conscious of the lofty nature of his reforms, he could not doubt that they would recommend themselves to public opinion. As for Abraham, of course the removal of the cattle must be insisted upon, but it would be easy afterwards to make that right. The value of the churchyard keep could be estimated. It lay within the range of measurement and arithmetic, and Mr. Percival felt quite prepared to pay a trifle for the preservation of the perfect unanimity and peace of Sutton.

The conversation took place on Tuesday. In the evening the cattle were still gazing over the wall. However, no great time had elapsed. Mr. Percival himself had said, "as soon as you can," a phrase admitting of considerable latitude of interpretation.

On the Wednesday Tranter Coombs delivered the new hymn-books, and that was a diversion.

On Thursday the heifers were still there. So was the sow with her ten little pigs.

On Friday Mr. Percival reflected that Abraham had himself mentioned Saturday as the regular date for removal. No doubt he would then drive them away never to return. But as it seemed inadvisable to meet Abraham without mention of the matter, and dangerous to prematurely re-open it, Mr. Percival went into the church, himself distributed the hymn-books, in the old high-backed pews and gallery, selected with care familiar hymns contained in both books, and made a careful note of the numbers.

On Saturday he went to inform Josiah Clarke.

There is a melancholy delicacy and a distinction about a flute, even when played in tune, which Josiah's never was. The only other instrument in the choir was a bassoon played by John Sandboy, much admired in Sutton, and called the "ho'se's lag." Josiah therefore was clearly the man to call

upon ; but Mr. Percival could not have made a more unfortunate choice. Abraham could not have kept silence in the presence of the new book ; but Josiah, in spite of his frank, wide-open eyes, was never in his life known to impart information.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Clarke."

"I hope I do zee you well, Zir," said Josiah.

"Yes, thank you. I want to substitute this new collection of hymns," said Mr. Percival.

"Oh !"

"I hope the congregation will be pleased with them. I have brought the numbers of those selected for to-morrow. I think you know them all."

"Ay, sure !" nodded Josiah.

"They are all in the old book."

"I suppose we mid zing 'em out o' the wold book, if we be a-minded."

"Well, we must begin at some time," laughed the parson. "So perhaps you'll kindly put up these numbers. It is a beautiful book, retaining all the best of the old hymns, with some new."

"Well done !" said Josiah.

The parson mistook the words for approval ; but this was only Josiah's way of expressing surprise. When he read in the almanac of predicted earthquakes, or that plagues and wars and excessive rains would bring ruin upon his country

before the year was out, he always said, "Well done!" in precisely the same tone of voice. Now he looked at the new book, and listened to its praises with all the simplicity of a child. Nobody would have suspected that those parted lips could ever refuse to "flutey." So Mr. Percival went home quite contented, rather wishing that Josiah was clerk. And the following day was Sunday.

Earlier than usual the parish clustered round the porch. The morning was not salubrious, and Abraham's beasts, still there, either from shyness or for shelter, huddled away in a distant corner of the churchyard. Everybody recognised the near approach of a crisis, but what form it might assume was a matter of opinion. Some feared Mr. Percival would not notice the beasts. Others argued that Abraham had the law upon his side. But all felt "cur'ous like to zee how pa'son ud look."

This expression touched the climax of human interest in Sutton.

The parson passed quickly up the path and entered the church. The parish dropped in behind him and settled into their seats.

A spirit of deeper devotion seemed to preside that morning over the earlier part of the service. Abraham did not move from his place, and Mr. John Culliford conscientiously joined in all the responses. The flute and bassoon surpassed them-

selves and each other, and the Gloria at the end of each psalm was a truly wonderful performance.

When the time to sing the first hymn arrived, Mr. Percival announced that in future the new book distributed amongst the pews was to be used; and the worshippers as usual turned slowly to the west and waited.

But no one in the gallery moved. No hand appeared above the rail to place the numbers on the stand, and not the slightest rustle of anticipation fluttered the green curtain.

There was something painfully solemn in this absence of whispered discussion, and the flute made no attempt whatever at the preliminary and sometimes prolonged effort to tune itself to the bassoon, which always cheered the hearts of the congregation.

The parson paused in perplexity. It seemed evident that something had gone amiss. Perhaps Josiah had mislaid or forgotten the paper upon which the instructions had been pencilled. Mr. Percival waited at least two minutes, and then gave out the hymn.

But nothing happened. The church remained as silent as the grave; and presently he knelt down to proceed with the service.

“ Almighty and everlasting——”

Suddenly from behind him in the chancel burst forth the lusty voice of Mr. John Culliford,—

“Let us sing to the praise an’ glory o’ God—the wold hundurdth.”

At once everything was changed. The flute squeaked with excitement, the bassoon groaned, and the congregation sang with all their lungs, not only in praise, but triumph.

CHAPTER XI

ON CHARITY, WITH A DIGRESSION INTO LOVE

IN the refinement of his sensibility, and having himself drunk the cup of experience not unmixed with sorrow, James Burt felt and expressed to Marion a genuine sympathy with the young clergyman. For some little time they did not meet him. But one winter morning, on the road between the willow trees at the foot of the hill, Mr. Percival, striding through the mud, overtook them returning from their usual walk. His face was thinner, and bore traces of anxiety. Already in the minds of young Churchmen was fermenting a spirit of discontent with existing conditions—a restlessness which a few years later assumed form in the movement known as Tractarianism. That he took his troubles to heart was evident, and Marion's quick ear detected an unexpected reserve in the manner of his greeting. But as they walked along together between the trees, it quickly thawed beneath her father's sympathy.

“The thing that worries me,” explained Mr. Percival, “is the absurdity of the whole matter, and

a humiliating feeling that were I an outsider, I should laugh. I would not for the world alter anything of importance to the people. The flute and the bassoon I hold as sacred, and neither would I profane by a touch. But these old hymns, cumbrous paraphrases of the Psalms, sometimes almost grotesque, and always too long for public worship—how can people be so wedded to old ways as to refuse to sing even an old hymn from a new book ? ”

By an easy step they passed on to a discussion on the dearth of good hymns.

“They so often lack the literary quality,” reflected the older man ; “ Prompted by piety, and piety cannot make a poet. Sometimes I think if poor Kirke White had been spared——”

He stopped, laid a thin white hand upon the sleeve of the clergyman, and pointing with his finger across the moor, repeated the lines :—

“ When marshalled on the nightly plain
The glittering host bestud the sky,
One star alone——”

His eye brightened. He stood erect and glanced at the heavy leaden sky, as if night were glittering in all its splendour, and Sirius shining forth in a solitude of incomparable excellence. He recited the poem to the end, before they proceeded on their way. The warmth of a fresh human inter-

course brought a glow into his heart, and quickened enthusiasms which had long lain dormant. Again and again, after a few steps, he arrested his companion to call attention to some line of peculiar sweetness, or to remark upon the purity of a verse. Sometimes to the cadence of a measure he gently waved his hand. To a casual observer, if any watched from the hill-side, his movements must have appeared humorous—even comic and grotesque; but to Marion this sudden outburst of unsuspected rapture sounded strangely pathetic. It moved her to pity for the loneliness of his life.

When they reached the house, with an insistence which overcame hesitation, he invited Mr. Percival to enter. In the study a fire was burning brightly, glistening upon the rows of brass-headed nails which studded the horse-hair chairs. An open volume lay upon the table. They sat down and talked of *Æschylus*, and the fortitude of Prometheus chained to the rock for his love toward men. But Mr. Burt was not at ease. Once he rose from his seat, crossed to his writing-desk, stood a moment in hesitation, as if seeking something he could not find, and then returned to the fireside. His enthusiasm had subsided. He seemed again to have sunk into despondency, to be infirm of purpose as of old. Yet he was restless, and kept moving in his chair.

"Marion, my dear, I think the door is open ; the lock does not always catch."

The girl crossed the room ; and as if gathering resolution from her movement, he leaned forward toward Mr. Percival and said, "I have myself—of late years—ah—been engaged upon a work, which daily nears completion——"

He stopped ; yet it was quite clear that all had not been said.

"A poem, Mr. Burt?" asked Mr. Percival.

"No," he slowly continued. "Even had I the power, my purpose scarcely admitted of presentation in poetic form. But I have re-cast and re-written my work many times. At first it was a book of considerable—nay, formidable dimensions. I fancied the ordinary reader might not willingly undertake so arduous a task. After much thought and judicious pruning, I reconstructed the subject matter in a series of tracts. But again I reflected, that in these days, when fiction is abundant, even serious matters require a certain lightness of treatment. Therefore I have since thrown each tract into the form of a Socratic dialogue. I will show you one, if I can put my hand upon it—yes, here it is 'Charity.'"

He drew his chair to the table, holding the sheet to catch the light which shone also on his silvery head. Then he read, and read, with ever-

increasing eagerness. The accumulated pathos of those years of patient labour saddened the girl's heart. She understood the lingering hope, the longing for sympathy, never openly expressed, but now kindling into flame in the presence of this new listener. Mr. Percival sat quite still. He had only come for one minute, and yet he stayed. She watched her father's growing delight, and was grateful.

The reading was over. The visitor warmly expressed his appreciation, and rose to depart—"You must let me come again, and continue our conversation," he said pleasantly.

The face of James Burt became radiant with delight. Yet there was sadness in his voice as he presently said :—

"Years ago I should have thought of publication but now——" He paused, as if to invite encouragement.

Mr. Percival had turned to bid Marion good-bye. "That is a mystery of which I understand nothing," he admitted.

She felt the friendliness in his tone, and was glad. And yet it all seemed so sad.

"We will walk across to Mr. Culliford's this afternoon, and inquire whether he is going to Bridgetown to-morrow," said Mr. Burt. Upon the

suggestion of Mr. Hensley, Mr. Culliford had once driven him to town ; but only on one occasion had Marion stood a visitor before a neighbour's door.

As before, Mr. Culliford opened it himself. "Come in. Come in," he cried lustily. "Come in both o' ee, out o' the win', an' warm your hearts."

Mr. John Culliford's humours were as variable as the British climate. To see him in shirt sleeves on a warm summer day, steadily pursuing his avocation, or listening to the gossip of Tranter Coombs, you would suppose that no excitement could ruffle his placid brow. To see him of an autumn evening, sitting reflective on a wall or rail, turning the leaves of his almanac with his moistened thumb, to ascertain the phases of the moon and the most propitious moment to put in a crop, you would believe that nothing on earth could induce him to condescend from this giddy height of pure reason. But beside the winter hearth Mr. John Culliford shone at his best.

"Come in. Come in. Zit down. Draw up your chair to the vire."

Almost bewildered by the rapidity of the movement, and scarcely knowing how it came about, Mr. Burt found himself in the Manor Farm kitchen sitting before a roaring wood fire.

"Get inzide, Missie. Take off your hat, an' get inzide."

Marion sat down in the corner, and the farmer rebuilt the logs so that the flames went blazing up the chimney.

"A bit o' vire do sim good. I reckon the winter is a'most 'pon us. Do ee hear the win' up the chimbley? 'T'es a sure sign o' rain avore marnen. Missus! Mr. Burt have a-comed in to bag o' ee vor the leastest drap o' warm gin an' water."

Astonishment at this astounding mis-statement (in reality Mr. Culliford's usual form of invitation), and a fear of being forced to swallow a cordial of which the effect even in moderation was doubtful, filled Mr. Burt with alarm. He raised his hands in horror and pushed back his chair.

"Bide where you be then, an' Missus shall gie 'ee some tay. Here, Tamsin, shut up the shutters —'tes a'most dark a'ready."

The firelight danced upon the blue flagstones and glistened on the dark oak beams. It shone on Tamsin's face as she crossed the kitchen, smiling to see her old mistress.

"And how are you, Tamsin?"

"Nicely, thank ee, Miss Marion," replied the girl with simple pride. Marion's eyes followed her to the mullioned window, and here and there a large flake of snow was drifting against the panes.

Mrs. Culliford's candles looked insignificant as stars when the glow of flaming sunset is still burn-

ing in the west, so richly did the blazing logs illuminate the room. The lavish warmth and brightness of the place already exercised an influence upon Marion's mind. Her eyes glistened with delight. The heat was almost scorching ; yet she gloried in the discomfort, just as she sometimes revelled in the bitter wind on the hill-top. Unconsciously she was breathing a new-found freedom, bright and exhilarating as fresh air. It quickened her heart and brought the colour to her cheek. Mr. Culliford was talking to her father with ever-increasing animation, but she heard never a word. The moaning of the wind, the roaring of the fire—she had forgotten them both ; yet she was listening intently for the slightest sound. Then came a step in the porch. The heavy oaken door creaked, and a gust of cold air rushed into the kitchen.

“Mr. Hensley,” said placid Mrs. Culliford.

As he came in, the girl trembled as if her conscience accused her of a hidden fault. He wore top-boots, and in his hand was a hunting whip, and he was striking the moisture from his sleeves. Then he sat down by her side.

“What, is there some fallings? I said 't 'ud rain,” cried Mr. Culliford.

“It is snowing,” replied Hensley.

“Marion, my dear, I think we had better be

going," said Mr. Burt nervously, attempting to rise.

But Mr. Culliford, extending an enormous hand, playfully pushed him back into his chair. " You ca'n't goo. You sha'n't goo, I tell 'ee. Zit down and drink another cup o' tay ; an' then we'll have a drap o' warm cider, an' a pipe, an' a chat ; an' then we'll have a drap o' gin an' water together ; an' then you shall goo, if you be a-minded, nice an' warm an' comfor'able."

" But we are not prepared for bad weather ! "

" Bad weather ! 'Tes nothen but a scud o' snow. If you do talk about gwain, I'll lock 'ee in, same as we did pa'son. Though, dall the feller, I wish we could a-locked *he out*—there, let un take out his tithe in kind—an' if do snow, you can bide. I tell 'ee, if 'tes rough weather you shall bide for a wick. You shall bide to Kursmas."

Mr. Culliford leaned back in his settle and laughed. In spite of his mirth, the words sounded more like menace than invitation, and the proposed programme made Mr. Burt shudder.

" It will not be much ; there was starlight between the clouds, and the moon rises in an hour," said Mr. Hensley.

The old gentleman must perforce accept the assurance, but for a few minutes he gazed into the fire in silence. Then he forgot the dangers of bad

weather, and the dread of intoxicants troubled him no more. He must speak a word in season. He must do his best to promote peace. Now that Mr. Percival had listened so appreciatively to the dialogue on 'Charity,' not only duty, but friendship impelled his kindly nature to frank speech.

"My dear Mr. Culliford," he began diffidently, "I do not think Mr. Percival is quite understood——"

"Not understood? So soon as ever I clapped eyes 'pon un, I see'd a terr'ble down-looken feller. I took the measure o' the man to once. Not understood? Why, I took un for one o' these-here rick-burnen rascals; an' so sure as the light he'll turn out wo'se 'an that. Ha! there's too much power a-gied to Popery these times. Tidden ricks they'd burn if they had their way. Oh no! Let un take out his tithe in kind. That's what I do say. Let un take out his tithe in kind. Now do 'ee draw in closer to the vire, Mr. Burt, an' make yourzelf at home."

"Ees. That's what Meäster zaid lest wick—let un take out his tithe in kind," chimed in Mrs. Culliford.

"But, my dear Mr. Culliford," pleaded James Burt, gaining courage in the face of opposition, "we must not judge too quickly; we must not let prejudices——"

“ Prejudices,” cried Mr. John Culliford, starting to his feet. “ John Culliford never didden have a prejudice in his life. Noo, noo. I be a Englishman, I be. I were born to Manor House Farm to Sutton, an’ so were my vather avore me, an’ my gran’vather avore he, all o’ the name o’ John, all died in their beds here, an’ buried in Sutton chich-yard. Sound-hearted, upstanden men, enjoyed their victuals, did harm to noo man. No, no, no, Mr. Burt ; there’s no prejudice. That don’t go wi’ the name o’ John Culliford.”

Restored to thorough good humour by these reflections, Mr. John Culliford re-seated himself upon the stability of his main argument.

“ I never heard so much as a whisper breathed against the Cullifords,” softly corroborated Mrs. Culliford.

“ But you quite mistake—— ”

“ No, no ! I don’t mistake, Mr. Burt. I tell ee, so soon as ever I zeed the man—— ”

“ I was going to say, you misapprehend my meaning—— ”

“ No, no, Mr. Burt. John Culliford ’ud so soon die as he’d wrong you or any other man.”

“ But as a Christian, one ought—— ”

“ Kurstian ! Kurstian ! All the Cullifords were a-baptized an’ a-bred up to the Church. They be noo Papists. Noo. Nor never will, if the name

do live so long as time do last. Let un take out his tithe in kind. That's nothen but law. Not but what I do respec' you, Mr. Burt. Now you'll have a drap o' gin an' water. Oh ay! Let un take out his tithe in kind. Missus, Mr. Burt do think he'll take a drap o' warm gin an' water."

"But, Mr. Culliford, we must live in all charity——"

"Charity!" quoth Mr. John Culliford. "Noo liven man ever bagged bread to John Culliford's door to be zend away empty."

"But I did not use the word in the sense of——"

"I thought you said charity," said Mr. Culliford doggedly.

"My dear Mr. Culliford, no one could doubt your kindness of heart. But we will renew the discussion another time. You must let me come to see you again; and, seated by your fireside, I will read you a little tract on 'Charity.' It is in the form of the Socratic dialogue, and I think——"

"Zo do 'ee! Zo do 'ee!" lustily interrupted Mr. Culliford, to whom the proposal suggested nothing more definite than opportunity for renewed hospitality. And just then Mrs. Culliford, who had been busy unobserved, stepped forward, a tumbler in her hand. Feeling that peace had been endangered, and anxious to propitiate his host, Mr. Burt

accepted the offering, and afterwards sat in silence, piteously sipping with hesitating lips.

Upon the seat in the chimney corner, in a sort of half seclusion, Mr. Hensley talked with Marion. He was speaking of adventures by flood and fell, of the gold fields, of chances of fortune rare and romantic, and the risk of being robbed. The girl listened intently. Sometimes she sat looking into the fire. Then she raised her eyes to the speaker, and meeting his glance, turned away with shy timidity. These stories of danger, whilst they filled the heart with fear, enthralled her. The novelty and freshness of narrative direct from life elated her beyond all previous experience, until gradually his easy, careless manner dispelled her timorousness, and she found courage even to question him. But he was tired of roaming, he said. He laughed in his light, airy way, as if the past were a frolic, and the future a mere joke. When he had looked around awhile, he should take a farm, and settle down for a quiet life.

With a sigh from the very depths of her heart, she saw her father rise to depart.

"Zit down. Zit down. Bide a bit longer," cried Mr. John Culliford. "No? Then wait while I do zee what weather 'tes."

Again the heavy oaken door creaked on its hinges.

"Odds bobs! Why, 'tes a groun' o' snow. An' the night's so dark as a bag. Zit down. We mus git the lanterns, an' bring 'ee gwain so vur as the high-road. Ha! ha! You mus' take care o' Missie, Mr. Hensley, an' I'll guide on the wold gen'leman."

The wind blew in gusts, and there was a drift between the gate and uppinstock. The earth was clad in a garment as soft as wool. The air felt quite warm; for the snow, as country people say, had brought down the cold. But the sky was still overcast, and only a faint silvery gleam behind the copse of pines showed that the moon had risen.

"Let we goo avore. I do know the way best," shouted Mr. Culliford. "You volly in my tracks."

Then Mr. Hensley's lantern went out; and thus several minutes were lost before Marion and he were ready to start. Across the field Mr. Culliford's light went dancing on like a will-o'-the-wisp. But the road, having no hedges, was indistinguishable, and once Marion stumbled upon the uneven ground. This journey, so unusual and unexpected, possessed for her all the charm of an adventure.

"Take care! Let me pilot you," he whispered. "There, the light is out again. So much the better. I can give you my undivided attention."

He dropped the lantern on the snow, and putting his hand upon her arm, led her into the road. Mr. Culliford and her father were getting farther in

advance, but he seemed in no hurry to overtake them. Mrs. Culliford had lent the girl a shawl to throw over her bonnet, and with one hand she was holding it together beneath her chin. A gust of wind raised it from her shoulders, and blew it fluttering over her head. She laughed and struggled in vain with the refractory garment. He replaced it. And then, to preclude further difficulties by holding the shawl in place, he put his arm round her waist. It was the attitude of the rustic lovers she had so often seen at dusk, or of a Sunday afternoon, when they sought the seclusion of the hill-side, or the solitude of the moor.

A child brought up without playmates, and grown into womanhood without tasting the glad gaiety of youth—to her the simplest action was fraught with deep significance. Even though it meant nothing, it came as the realization of a dream. She had often wondered how Love might come—with what phrases he would disclose himself. And now, uncalled and unrecognised, he crept into her heart without a word to announce or welcome him.

"So you have never come to meet me," he whispered. "I have watched for you every day. But now we know each other better. You must promise something definite to-night. Come to-morrow."

"I could not."

"When Mr. Burt goes to Bridgetown."

"The snow will be deep in the lane."

'The hollow shelters the road. Come and see."

"No, no. I must make haste, or father will be waiting. They are so far in front."

There was no trifling in her refusal. The tacit understanding that their meeting must be a secret filled her with vague alarm. She felt instinctively that her father would disapprove. And yet the whispered possibility sounded pleasant in the ear.

"You must come. I cannot go on loving you like this, and not tell you of it."

The wind had again fallen, and across the field in the still night came the voice of Mr. Culliford, raised to its highest pitch of warm-hearted vindictiveness. "Let un take out his tithe in kind. That's nothen but law. Let un take out his tithe in kind."

The familiar sound dispelled the feeling of solitude; and just then the moon shone through a rift in the cloud, and they could see the clump of trees in the home ground, and distinguish the shapes of the village roofs against the sky.

"I must make haste," she insisted, and freeing herself she walked resolutely forward. "You see they are waiting. They have reached the gate," she cried excitedly, pointing to Mr. Culliford's lantern, now at rest.

" Marion, where are you ? " called her father.

The words sounded like an accusation, and her scarcely noticeable delay magnified itself into an infinite loitering. Like the fruit of Eden, this first taste of love awakened her self-consciousness; and, had it been possible, she too could have hidden amongst the trees. She walked quite rapidly, scarcely hearing and not heeding the appeal Mr. Hensley addressed to her. Her only desire was to rejoin her father, and reach home without comment. But nobody remarked that they had been long. It was the most natural thing in the world that a lantern should go out.

It had become much lighter, and amidst the familiar objects of the village, Mr. Burt and Marion walked briskly homewards.

" I think Mr. Culliford was pleased with my proposal to read to him," said he, as they passed the church.

" It appeared so, Father," replied the girl, suddenly recalling her wandering attention. But he was too absorbed to notice her abstraction.

These unexpected hours of human companionship had quickened the spirit of James Burt; for, wishing Marion "good-night," he added, " I think I will sit up awhile and write."

She took the precious miniature from the wall, and seated herself upon the bed.

“Yes! He loves me!”

She assured her heart of this great truth. She confided it to the picture again and again, until the eyes seemed to look back into hers with a new light of understanding and approval. An idea, often present to her, returned that night with the vivid force of a reality. She fancied her mother's spirit, ever near, was wont to watch over her. This was consistent with all she had ever heard, or read, or thought of the mysteries of Life, and Death, and Eternity. Her mother was there—at that moment by her side—and Marion pressed her lips upon the tiny portrait, and spoke aloud. She had only one theme—that this man loved her. Who should understand it with a deeper sympathy than this lost mother who herself had loved so madly?

At midnight when her father walked upstairs, a line of light was still shining beneath Marion's door. Passing, he gently tapped upon the panel.

“Not in bed, child, not in bed? You will ruin your eyes,” he chided, half in approval.

Within the scope of his consideration was only one passion—the passion for learning, strong enough to overcome the claims of night. Yet love had come that evening to one heart at least.

CHAPTER XII

SUTTON IN ARMS

WITH the drawing in of the days Tranter Coombs brought darker stories of the terrible doings up the country. Captain Swing was about again, sure enough. Half the ricks in Hampshire were a-burned. A pack o' fellers did goo about wi' faces so black as the very wold Nick hisself, an' beat up the machinery wi' sledge-hammers into bits the size o' ho'se beans. The tranter deprecated these proceedings, as likely to upset the country, look-y-zee ; but he thought the proposed locomotive ought to be put down by law.

He used to collect tales and scraps from newspapers, irrespective of dates, and recount them one after another, with accumulative interest. These stories, appearing of necessity in serial form, infinitely multiplied themselves. First the crime itself ; then the apprehension on suspicion ; the dismissal with its regretful uncertainty, since iniquity was still at large ; the arrest of the real criminal ; the trial, conviction, and ultimate turning-off which followed hard upon it. With the lapse of time

sequence got broken ; the ordinary mind became confused. Then the imagination of Sutton rose to the occasion. It added, head and tail, parts essential to any healthy narrative, and the merest disjointed fragment became a living organism.

A feeling of insecurity quickened the patriotic spirit of Sutton.

Mr. John Culliford had been appointed sergeant of the new troop of Yeomanry Cavalry, and recruits poured in from all the adjacent villages. Mr. Hensley joined ; so did Solomon Moggridge the constable, and a couple more other young chaps from Upton. So did Abraham Bartlett and Josiah Clarke. For if Sutton were a small place it had a great heart, and, as often happens with little people, a great deal of pride.

As Mrs. Culliford said to Mrs. Carew, " Though there mid be but vew, the more reason not to look foolish."

So the cavalry of Sutton, with a reinforcement from Upton, used to exercise twice a week on the level moor behind Mr. Burt's house, and wonderful were the evolutions there performed. As these drills were voluntary, and undertaken purely from martial spirit, recruits did not don their gorgeous tunics of blue and gold but came just as they were. If Abraham was busy, he rolled his smock around his waist, girded on his sword, mounted his mare,

and was ready. Josiah, however, when time allowed, preferred to put on his helmet, a handsome piece of burnished metal, displaying in front the lion and the unicorn in brass. He questioned the stability of this imposing ornament. "Zo zure as a gun," argued Josiah, "if I don't min' out, woone o' these days when I be to a gallop, he'll vall off." But Josiah, being sadly deficient in self-confidence, was a prey to nervous fears.

From her window Marion constantly watched the proceedings.

One morning the horse of Sutton drew up close to the house to practise the sword exercise. They were all there. Abraham and Josiah, Solomon Moggridge and Mr. Hensley, and the couple more other young chaps from Upton. Mr. Culliford took up a position in front to instruct and give the word of command.

"Now then," said he. "Zo zoon as I do zay *Draw*—bide zo quiet as mice. But when I do holla *Swords*—out wi' 'em.

"*Draw*—No, no, Solomon Moggridge. Put un back, put un back. Now then——

"*Draw—Swords.*"

Seven weapons flashed in the winter sun like seven o'clock—striking.

"Now, that's very tidy," shouted Abraham in great delight. "I do call we done that to rights."

“Ay! Zo right as ninepence. I waited vor the word thik time,” boasted Solomon, legitimately proud of having withstood temptation.

Elated with this great success, they continued the exercise with zeal. Under the superintendence of Mr. John Culliford, they slashed to the right, they slashed to the left, they dealt the most terrible downright blows. The seven chiefs before Thebes at no time made a bolder show than these good men of Sutton and Upton. Yet it fell to the lot of Josiah, a man so mild that he would not willingly have hurt the hair of a mouse, to perform a feat which brought tears into his great blue eyes.

“Stop! stop! Heart alive, stop! If I ha’n’t a-chopped off my ho’ses’ near ear.”

The little troop promptly returned their swords to their scabbards, and gathered round, intent upon investigation.

The beauty of the animal was certainly impaired, for, as Abraham sympathetically pointed out, “though mid be little better ’an a inch a-gone, the loss o’ it do gie the ho’ses a sart ov a one-eyed look.”

But Constable Moggridge discovered consolation even in oddity. He said, “Wull, if Josiah do ever lose thik ho’ses, or have un a-stoled, he could swear to thik ho’ses if ’twere out o’ ten thousan.”

Mr. John Culliford took a more serious view of the matter. He reflected that only the intervention

of Providence prevented Josiah from cutting off the head ; and if, please God, Josiah should ever chance to clip back t'other ear to anything like a good match, there'd be nothing in it to catch any man's eye.

" Ah ! " sobbed Josiah, taking off his golden helmet to mop his yellow head. "'T'es a lesson indeed. Noo more sodgeren vor I. Noo more sodgeren vor I."

But the company would not hear of Josiah's resignation ; for as to the ho'se, he wasn't hurt one mo'sel bit. When Josiah dismounted, availing himself of the universal sympathy that horse cropped grass. After all, he was just as good as ever for a charger—or to fetch in the milk.

Then the philosophic temper of Sutton, having noted the effect, proceeded to inquire the cause.

At first Josiah affirmed that the horse " mus' a-reared hisself up like, jis at the very nick o' time when——"

But this explanation was overruled by a consensus of public opinion thoroughly well acquainted with the horse ; and Josiah admitted having been at the moment preoccupied " wi' thik 'nation fool thing ov a helmet." So everything ended happily, and the troop dismissed. As Mrs. Culliford afterwards said to Mrs. Carew, " A'ter all did really ought to keep a body up in heart like, if only to

show what a power there is in a sword well handled."

As the little company dispersed, Mr. Hensley turned his horse's head, and instead of riding towards the gate, cantered across the mead. In comparison with the ragged-coated hacks of the yeomen, his mount was a picture of equine beauty. At a short distance from the rhine he drew rein—then struck his horse with the spur, and took the black water flying. The others loitered to watch and applaud. Mr. Hensley leapt the ditch some half a dozen times, forwards and back ; and then they all rode away together, leaving the moor as desolate and soulless as a winter day.

At least so it seemed to Marion. From behind the window curtain, in tremulous excitement, unseen she had watched the proceedings. How splendid he was ! With what ease and carelessness he rode ! These dykes, dark, stagnant, reported to be many feet deep in water and unfathomable in mud, never babbling like a brook, nor laughing like the running stream, but frowning between two rows of cold green rushes, were always associated in her imagination with danger and disaster. Sometimes a cow was found to have fallen in ; then followed an alarm and a hasty rush of villagers to dig her out. And once within Marion's recollection, a Sutton man, returning of a Saturday night

with his chores from Bridgetown, mistaking the road, walked into the water and was drowned. These gloomy associations filled her heart with awe. When the horse leapt she held her breath ; as he alighted neatly like a bird she gave a sigh of relief. In proportion with this perception of peril was her admiration for the cool daring of the man, who in mere frolic undertook such feats. She felt the fascination of physical strength and courage, virtues often vividly brought before her mind in ancient books, but never realized in her secluded life. Her father was timidity itself. She doubtless shared the faint-heartedness of her sex, a conscious timorousness in the face of imagined danger, in contrast with which the boldness of manhood shone with incomprehensible and dazzling force. In her eyes the man became a hero.

And he loved her. The thought sent a thrill through her veins. He had asked her to meet him, and although consent was impossible, with a lapse of time the idea had grown very familiar. Insensibly a longing to see him, to listen to him, crept into the innermost cranny of her heart. It overcame every scruple and pervaded her being. With strange inconsistency she lost her doubts in the fear that he might mistake her absence for a refusal of his love.

The snow remained on the ground several days,

then gradually disappeared beneath continuous gentle rain. But to-day the air was as soft as spring. The winter sun smiled insincere welcome upon an unexpected butterfly fluttering upon Marion's pane. When she opened the window there came a scent of purple violets from the bank beneath the garden hedge.

Of late the walks had ceased. Her father was at work eagerly retouching a dialogue in the expectation that Mr. Percival might call in the afternoon. He would not care to stir. The moment was in every way favourable, and why should she hesitate? For years a daily journey through the copse and over the hill had been habitual. She would ask her father to accompany her, and should he refuse, every maidenly scruple would be satisfied.

He scarcely raised his head when she entered the study.

"Will you go out this morning, Father?" she said.

"Well, my dear, I rather wanted—Yes, yes I will."

He laid down his pen, but his eyes were still fixed upon the page.

"You are busy—and would rather I went alone?"

He hesitated a moment. "Do, do, my child," he replied, with evident relief.

The village street was empty as she walked

down the causeway, and through the narrow drang. The lane looked lonely. The hedgerows, bare except for the catkins on the hazel bushes, were thick and high, completely shutting off the fields. The way was little used and grass-covered, and here and there upon the sheltered side remnants of a snow-drift, soiled and wasted, still remained. There were no recent signs of human presence, but a few tracks of horses' hoofs.

She passed through the hollow beneath the overhanging pines and reached the hill-top. To have seen no one was both a disappointment and a relief.

Across the road drifted a thin film of blue smoke with the smell of burning sticks; and from over-hedge came the sound of a boy's voice. But Johnny had found a new song—

“ Holly ho ! Blackey-cap,
Don't thee steal my meäster's crap,
While I lie down an' have a nap.
For if my meäster chance to come
Thee mus' flee, an' I mus' run.”

Beyond the copse a low, lichen-covered walk divides the field from the road, and attracted by the melody, Marion looked over in search of the singer. Close by, stooping to light his pipe by Johnny's fire, was Mr. Hensley. At that moment he rose. The girl's cheek flushed crimson, as if

she were detected in a crime, as he came clambering over the wall to talk to her.

"I have watched for you every day," he laughed. "People say you care nothing about weather, but I saw you had not been. Which way did you come?"

"I came up the hill."

"My horse is tied up by the trees. I should have seen your footprints and overtaken you in a minute. Have you ever been to the bottom of the copse?"

"Oh, no! We have always kept to the road."

"I have never been able to keep to the road," he cried gaily, and yet to her quick ear the words seemed tinged with regret.

His careless manner restored her self-possession. He had dropped the lover, and talked with the ease of a familiar friend, the gaiety of a comrade. The copse was open to the road, and as they walked between the trees he kept striking the fir-cones with his riding-whip. The fallen spines from the larches covered the ground, making it brown and dry like a floor. She stopped to look at a last year's nest in the leafless underwood.

"Lower down there are springs. The water overflows from a pit into a gully. Let us go and see."

He cleared the sprawling brambles from before her feet, and held aside the branches for her to

pass. Thus they pushed their way into an open space at the bottom of the wood. The pit, half inclosed with thick thorn bushes, was overshadowed with trees. The moist ground below was covered with reeds and rushes, from which, with a hoarse quack and a flurry of wings, a wild duck rose at the sound of their approach. Marion gave a quick cry of delight. In comparison with the cold moor and the rugged hill-top, this nook was a fairy-land.

"Look ! It is quite like lace."

She was pointing to a margin of soft mud at the mouth of the pit covered with a tracery of birds' claws.

"They came there in the bad weather," he said. "The springs are warm and never freeze. The big ones are a moorhen's. That was a blackbird went hopping along the edge. The small one that ran must have been a wagtail."

"I suppose nobody ever comes here."

"Nobody. It is left for you and me to come here all alone, and love each other. I loved you the first time I saw you—the first time I heard your voice upon the hill. And I know you love me—you must love me—you shall——"

He had thrown his arm around her neck, and was wildly kissing her. His words rang in her ears—his kisses burnt upon her forehead, her cheek

her lips. One momentary impulse to resist, and a sense of happiness crept over her as she acquiesced in this inevitable love. It did not even seem strange. From the first she had foreseen it. It had filled her thoughts, occupied her dreams, and interwoven itself with her solitude. It was so natural, so sequent, so familiar to the longing of her heart, that it came to her soul as a blessing fore-ordained and heaven-sent.

“You will love me,” he whispered. “You do.”

What could she say? The words were hidden in her heart, and she must needs hide her face upon his shoulder, because she could not utter them.

Suddenly she was startled by an ejaculation of anger. “Come away,” he whispered eagerly.

In the arable ground above the pit stood Johnny Sandboy. An unerring rustic instinct had taught the boy that something must be moving where the wild duck rose. A native inquisitiveness led him to the spot. He had climbed the bank, and from that eminence looked down upon the lovers with the lofty indifference of early youth.

They passed quickly out of sight amongst the trees. He returned to business—

“Holly ho ! Blackey-cap,
Don't thee steal my meäster's crap.”

CHAPTER XIII

SPRINGTIME

THE winter passed quite quietly. No sound of the prevailing discontent was heard in Sutton, and the Christmas festivities were unmarred by violence or misfortune. The carol-singing to some extent restored harmony to the parish. It was recognised that singers who could sing so well were throwing away God's gifts to be silent. As Mrs. Culliford said to Mrs. Carew, it wasn't Mr. Percival that was hurt by it. And even if the parish should sing out of the new book, there was no need to give way on the principle. Sure you can sing out of all the books of creation, if you be a mind to. A pretty thing indeed if you couldn't. And so on the Sunday as Candlemas came on the Tuesday, Josiah unexpectedly struck up with the flute, John Sand-boy joined in with the bass, and the whole parish praised God, without prejudice.

But everybody stood firm about the tithe.

So the parson had no alternative but to build himself a barn and granary, and this work excited the interest of Sutton during the whole of the

spring. The little place had never witnessed such activity. Everybody in the village (except Girt-gran-dadder, who, duller than ever since Johnny went to work, could not be made to understand) walked through the drang twice a day to the piece of glebe at the back of the parsonage, to note the progress of the journeyman mason from Upton. Many people spent their leisure thus, and in Sutton considerable leisure was allowed.

The winter wheat grew up out of the way, and Johnny was keeping a field of beans at the other end of the farm. No eyes now could overlook the pit, and the copse was as lovely as lovers could wish. Buds began to swell upon the boughs, and the grass to spring. Birds were mating. Chaffinches went glinting between branches glistening with moisture, and the air was full of song.

Marion met her lover every day. The concourse of people to look at the new barn destroyed the privacy of the lane, and she used to take the road skirting the moor and ascend the hill by the footpath through the fields, where the straggling rookery studs the elm trees. The rooks were busy then, marauding and mating like the rest of the world. The desire for secrecy prompting this round-about route grew with the increase of her love. Once or twice her father had spoken slightly of Mr. Hensley, as of a man without

learning and wanting stability of character, and that made her diffident. She feared the displeasure, mild but unyielding, which perhaps awaited the disclosure of her love. The simplicity of her girlish life had fled, to be followed by a complexity of emotion which kept her heart in continual agitation. Her love was a delirium of joy, overcast at times with a dark cloud of vague presentiment.

She was walking along the causeway with her father one morning, when Mr. Percival overtook them just as Mr. Hensley came riding by.

" I do not think I have ever seen that gentleman on foot. He does not attend Sutton church," said the clergyman drily.

The remark conveyed an unexpressed disparagement. The paved way was narrow, and to conceal her emotion the girl stepped back and walked behind the others. She listened intently as her father replied with his quiet smile :—

" He once rendered me a timely service. And yet I scarcely know him. I suppose we are not congenial.

" I know something of his family. I fancy he has given his friends some trouble, and run through a considerable fortune. The sort of man who, as they say, is only his own enemy."

" Let us hope he has settled down now."

"There is a rumour that he gambles a great deal."

Mr. Burt sighed. His soul overflowed with charity, and condemnation melted to pity in the warmth of his heart. "If only somebody could speak to him," was all he said.

The girl drank in this conversation eagerly. So commonplace in manner, yet so free from censoriousness, it carried conviction upon every word. Besides, Mr. Hensley had often spoken lightly of himself. The indignation aroused by Mr. Percival's criticism was swept away by her father's final remark. She was moved by the force of its deep sympathy. She shared this simple confidence in the power of speech ; and the suggestion taking possession of her mind, assumed all the force of a command.

She had promised to meet her lover that morning, but now perhaps it might be impossible. Could *she* speak to him ? The impulse was irresistible, yet she was full of fear lest by so doing she might lessen his love.

They reached home. "Come in, Mr. Percival. Come in," urged James Burt.

They entered the house, her father leading the way into the library. The girl closed the door behind them and stood hesitating one moment in the passage. Could she, unmissed, go out whilst their visitor was present, and return unobserved

before his departure? She was already late. Suddenly, as if from without, her mind was made up. She quietly opened the front door, passed unseen through the garden, and into the road. It was like making an escape, and she hurried between the pollard willows and across the field, unobservant of the wind, the sunshine, or the primroses peeping upon the sheltering bank.

He was waiting in the road on the hill.

As her eyes alighted upon him her fears fled. When he kissed her all doubts vanished. There was no room in life for anything but love, and her heart was full of it. They walked upon the open down, in the winding tracks amongst the gorse and dried-up heather to a small quarry, from which at that time was drawn the stone for mending roads. No one was in sight. The place was so remote that pick-axes and tools were safely left for weeks upon the ground. They seated themselves on a level ledge against the side of the rock.

Her anxiety returned, but under the fascination of his presence her purpose wavered. She would not tell what she had heard, and yet she could not hide her disquietude.

"Is anything the matter?" he presently asked.

"I was afraid I could not come. Then I walked fast, and now I am resting," she replied with an attempt at gaiety; but the explanation

sounded unnatural and insufficient. "Do you know the feeling that it is impossible to talk? That is the time to listen. Now tell me all about yourself. You have never told me why you went abroad, nor any of your history before that."

"That would be too much like a confession," he laughed, in the old irresponsible manner.

"It does not appear to oppress your conscience."

"What a serious maiden it is, without a trace of frivolity!" he said quite kindly. "I go in awe of you. Did you ever commit any folly besides this?"

"Besides what?"

"This loving me."

His manner pained her. To speak of love as folly was a form of blasphemy, like treating with levity a holy subject. But his arm was around her neck, and for protest, she only nestled closer to his side.

Suddenly, as if in compunction at some unwelcome recollection, his demeanour changed.

"I have always been a fool," he cried bitterly. "I have wasted everything—friends, money, character, all there is. It runs in my blood to squander, and soon there will be nothing left."

"But if you see this so clearly——"

She paused. His words filled her with perplexity. Surely to recognise in an action evil, or

an evil consequence, was to render performance impossible? It defeated intention and paralysed the will. Sheltered from temptation, and unsuspecting of the passion which lurks like hidden mutiny in the untried human heart, her experience could offer no explanation in so strange a matter.

"Yes, I see it clearly enough—afterwards. But the moment is always too strong. There is a weak link in my best resolution, and there it breaks. I have determined hundreds of times never to touch another card, yet I meet a man and go in and play. I came to learn how to manage the remnant of my estate, but I should scarcely be here one day in the week, if I did not stay to see you. I said, I will never breathe a word of love to Marion Burt; yet a snow-storm, a gust of wind, a touch of the finger against her cheek—and all my prudence is blown to the four quarters of the globe!"

She quietly freed herself from his embrace. Her heart sank and the colour forsook her cheek. "You feel that it is imprudent?" she faltered. Her joy at his love was always mingled with surprise, and she was capable of renunciation.

"I feel that it is my only happiness or hope. I wish it had come to me years ago. Then perhaps things might have been different. I might have been a wiser man."

"But you can be now. You are," she cried with the enthusiasm of love.

"For a moment you make it seem possible. But nothing lives so long as a bad record. It crops up again and again. It chokes everything. Ill-natured stories and gossip may find their way even into Sutton. Your father will hold up his hands in horror, and you will turn your back upon me with scorn."

"No, no! Never!" she murmured, and by way of emphasis she placed her hand in his. A touch of sympathy sufficed to effect a change upon his quick, impressionable nature. From a depth of despondency his spirit suddenly rose upon the bright ephemeral wings of hope.

"Would nothing change your love, Marion?"

"No. No. Nothing!"

"Not even disgrace?"

"I should know you did not deserve it."

"But if it were beyond all question. Open to everybody's eyes and clear as the day?"

"I should say it happened in the past, and that you began afresh from to-day."

He pressed her to his heart. His kisses were interspersed with wild ejaculations of extravagant praise and passionate love. She was an angel! his guiding star! his love! his hope! his saviour! From that moment everything should be changed.

She had lifted him out of the mire, and would protect him against himself. He had still enough—with care. Or they might go abroad and live in affluence; and he would worship her as his good angel, to the day of his death.

This quick transition from self-reproach to confidence made a deep impression upon Marion Burt. She never doubted that love might effect a change as great as this, and greater. It was the most natural thing in the world, and indeed the most beautiful, that woman, otherwise so weak, should shed upon mankind an influence as subtle as the light. No limitation marred the alchemy of love.

But the time had passed quickly and she must go. They retraced their steps between the gorse and ling, and he walked with her along the hill-top and down the slope to the stile. There they parted and she hastened homewards.

The sun was shining brightly on the fields, the glistening hedgerows, and the tall elm trees. The spirit of spring beamed everywhere. It rode upon the fleecy cloud, glanced from the brambles straggling over the ditch, and smiled upon the fresh grass. Even the wind had no malice as it swept across the moor and sang in the swaying tree-tops. At the foot of the hill, beneath the rookery, old Grammer Sandboy, in her weather-

stained frock, was picking up an apron-full of dead sticks, the harvest of the early spring.

The girl tripped gaily down the hill-side. Her heart was never so light ; her soul had never soared with such transcendant freedom. All the longings of her girlhood, the aspirations of her solitary rapture, were satisfied. She was loved and destined to work the reformation of the man who loved her. The warmth of his kisses was still glowing on her cheek. The sap of a new life was stirring in her veins, and everything was exalted and transformed. The birds sang, and she was one of them. She was engrafted, a vital part of that great cosmos which hitherto she had only looked upon with eyes ; and the future was a summer of sunshine and flowers. In this universal change her lover's failings were cast off, like the parched leaves on the oak sapling in the hedgerow. Had not every son of Adam his sin ? Moses his moment of folly, and David a fault so fearful that she shuddered to think upon it ? And was there not the parable of the prodigal which her father so often loved to read ? Yes, her father would learn of Mr. Hensley's reformation, and approve their love.

The old woman, sometimes stooping, then scanning the ground and advancing a few steps, had drawn near to the path. Her apron was almost full, and she stood up to rest awhile. A

crafty smile crept over her wrinkled face, and as Marion came by she hobbled a few paces forward and stood in the way.

"Ha! There's noo call to be afeard," piped the crone in a thin, quavering voice. "There's noo more harm in the wold witch than in many a Kurstian. Shall she tell 'ee a secret? She could speak the word that 'ud burn up your heart like a flower in a vrost, if she wer' a-minded. She could turn your blood so thin as water, and your cheek so white as a maggot for a twelvemonth an' a day——"

Frightened at these words, which sounded so much like menace, Marion stepped aside; but the old woman extended her long, lean hand, brown and hard as old unpolished oak, and laid it on the girl's wrist.

"I tell 'ee, the old Grammer Zandboy 'ud walk to Bridgetown barefoot to do 'ee a good turn, for the sake o' your purty face as you do walk down street. But 'tes beyon' wit to teach wisdom to a maid in love. She've a-got ears but for one voice an' noo eyes to look avore. There'll be a dark day avore the winter do come back. An' I'll tell 'ee a word to lay up in your heart, an' think upon in your old age when you've a-got time to think. Double-wooded an' never wed. That's your lot an' your luck. An' better luck, too, than to volley

your own way. Double-wooded an' never wed—one in house and one on hill. Double-wooded an' never——”

Her eye caught sight of a moss-covered stick, and still muttering these words she hobbled away.

The girl walked quickly on, but all her gaiety was gone. The meaningless phrase kept ringing in her ears and she trembled with excitement as if it were from fear. “One in the house and one on the hill.” There was an aptness in the foolish saying, an alliterative point with more force than truth; and although she was not superstitious, it overshadowed and oppressed her spirit like a cloud. Frightened and preoccupied, she failed to observe her father waiting in the road beside the willow trees.

“Where have you been, Marion?” he said. “As Mr. Percival went, we saw you on the hill and I walked down to meet you. Who was talking to you?”

“In the road I met Mr. Hensley.”

It was the truth and she answered carelessly, yet her heart sank self-accused of prevarication.

Her father walked a few steps in silence. “I do not like that young man,” he said thoughtfully; and she understood the disapproval troubling his mind although unexpressed.

It was only a passing cloud. “I did not know

you were going out," he continued with a smile. "Mr. Percival wanted to see you. He had something to suggest—a sort of proposal to make to you. But he shall tell you for himself. I will not impart his secrets."

CHAPTER XIV

GIRT-GRAN-DADDER A-TOOKT

AFTER the beans the spring barley, and Johnny was moved to the ground at the back of the rookery. There was a sandy bank with a double blackthorn hedge at the top; and the bank was covered with primroses, the thorns with blossoms as sweet and white as maidens' frocks upon May-day. It was in this paradise that Johnny commenced that career of iniquity which many people predicted would terminate on the gallows.

The days were lengthening out. A full-fledged rook, fallen from the nest, lay dead beneath the elm tree. The sun was high, and at midday Johnny used to lie on his back upon the bank, gaze into the infinite sky and yodle by the hour. Then he stopped to think of Girt-gran-dadder's stories and the fool. The old man had once possessed a power of vivid narrative, and Johnny in his day-dream clearly pictured the hero in his parti-coloured garment and conical hat. It became the desire of his life to see a fool. Oh! if he could only "zee a fool," Then he fell asleep.

One day soon after noon Mr. John Culliford

came riding round the farm. He stopped at the gate, glanced high and low, peered into the elm trees, and craned his neck to look into the ditch; but nowhere was Johnny to be seen. It was a natural inference, based upon a knowledge of the depravities of boyhood, that some devilish mischief was in course of perpetration; and Mr. John Culliford deliberately dismounted, hooked the rein over the gate-post, climbed stealthily over the gate, and looked around. After a brief search he found Johnny. The boy's yellow head, freckled face, and weather-stained smock were scarcely distinguishable from the sandy bank upon which he lay, sleeping with a barefaced assumption of innocence, which made Mr. John Culliford's blood boil with indignation. In Mr. Culliford's hand was a little ground-ash stick, and he walked across a corner of the barley on tiptoe.

Of what transpired there remains only Mr. John Culliford's brief account.

He "woke un."

As Mrs. Culliford afterwards said to Mrs. Carew, "'T'es the most laziest young rascal that ever trod out shoe-leather. But Meäster woke un."

"I'll be boun' Mr. Culliford woke un. An' quite right too; for to my mind the Zandboys be nothen but a disgrace to Zutton, all the lot o' 'em," replied Mrs. Carew.

This version of the affair received indirect corroboration from Abraham, who was up-top o' parish to the time. He heard Mr. John Culliford "had a-woked zomebody to rights, sure 'nough," but he "couldn' zay of his own knowledge that 'twere Johnny."

"He woke un, you mid depen'," agreed Josiah in a tone of mild but firm conviction.

The suddenness of this awakening increased the restlessness of Johnny's spirit, and he became more than ever discontented with the narrowness of his experience. But one day a procession of caravans in orange-chrome and red went crawling along the hill-top. It was an annual occurrence, and Girt-gran-dadder had often traced the route from fair to fair, and town to town, with minute accuracy. Invariably they stayed a night at Upton to give a performance upon the village green, and thence to Cheddar for the May-fair. Reports of this glorious show sometimes reached Sutton, but the inhabitants never went. Doubtless their self-denial was prompted by jealousy of Upton, but they declared, with suspicious unanimity, that if the whole boiling o' it was ever to draw up in Sutton Street they wouldn't so much as put their heads outside the door to look at it. But Johnny ran up into the road to watch the pageant pass. Solemnly it rolled by. A man wearing a moleskin

waistcoat was sitting on one of the shafts, who Johnny thought must be the fool.

The boy followed a short distance, until fear of Mr. Culliford drove him back to the primrose bank. A restless craving to slip away to Upton kept him wide awake that afternoon; but the risk was too great. At evening the blaring of trumpets and the distant booming of the big drum stirred his courage to the sticking point, and under cover of the dusk he ran across the hill. The caravans had been drawn up in a right-angle under the shelter of Upton elms. Torches were flaring, flashing intermittent glory on the 'square of white-washed cottages around the green. All Upton was out of doors. The drum beat again. There was a universal rush towards a centre of dazzling light, in contrast with which the nut-stall and the shooting-standing were cast into gloom. Men shouted, women laughed and screamed, and children clamoured to be lifted upon their fathers' shoulders. Then followed the silence of expectation as a ring of eager faces gathered around the stage.

Curiosity triumphed over shyness, and Johnny gradually pushed his way into the front.

At last the supreme moment came. A curtain at the back was pushed aside, and a god in spangles stepped upon the scene. He turned somersaults, and walked round, head downwards,

on his hands. The applause was rapturous. Then the fool bowed, advanced to the front of the stage, and explained that all he wanted was to borrow a good-looking boy for just five minutes. The same should be returned right-side-up with a ha'penny in his palm. Without hesitation he singled out Johnny, and called him by his Christian name.

"Come, Johnny; don't stan' there wi' your vinger in your mouth."

Still the boy had not courage to accept the greatness so unexpectedly forced upon him.

Burning to distinguish himself, he yet lacked the self-assurance necessary for public life. He longed to go, but dared not. Then somebody from behind gave him a push; and, turning to expostulate, he caught sight of his father's fustian jacket elbowing its way amongst the people. Like a frightened rabbit he burrowed through the crowd, fled across the green, and faded into the darkness.

But along the lonely road and down the hill-side the splendour of that dazzling scene danced like a will-o'-the-wisp before the boy's imagination. The reality surpassed the richest recollections of Girt-gran-dadder. His courage rose. He pictured himself ascending the stage amidst deafening plaudits—another time. Ambition soared. He

conceived the happy idea of becoming himself a fool. Then he ran with all his might, fearing that his father, taking some other way, might arrive home before him.

He listened a moment at the window-shutter beside Girt-gran-dadder's outdoor seat. He could hear no voices, only the sobs of the bellows as his mother blew the fire with sharp, impatient jerks. It sounded ominous, but he softly raised the latch and went inside.

Girt-gran-dadder and Grammer were sitting on either side of the hearth. His mother, in front, her back towards the door, quickly turned her head at the creaking of the hinge.

"Zo here's the young husburd," she cried, with rapid crescendo "an' his vather gone to Upton to look a'ter un. Though only the wold Nick hisself do know when he'll be back now he's once out o' the house. Not till midnight, I'll go bail, an' put more down his droat in a hour than he'll earn in a wick o' Zundays. But goo on up out o' the way. He'll dust your jacket vor 'ee purty tidy come marnen. Git on up out o' the way. Take your teddies an' git on up out o' the way."

The boy, only too glad of an opportunity to escape, crept upstairs without a word.

At daybreak, but before the village was astir, the

cottage door stealthily opened, and Johnny peeped up and down the village street. Nobody was about, and he passed the garden and out of the hatch without detection. But instead of going to carol upon his arable ground, he took the contrary direction, through the parish and into the lane. He was afraid some early riser might meet him and be inquisitive about the small bundle in his hand ; and in the seclusion of the hollow he ran. Then over the down, leaving Upton away upon the right, still lying asleep, with never a sound and never a breath of smoke. And so for miles amongst the golden gorse until he reached the Cheddar road. By that time the sun was well up, and he sat to rest in the long shadow of an old milestone.

At half-past five, finding the cottage door open, Mrs. Sandboy stepped briskly into the road. Her anger against Johnny was swallowed in the depth of her virtuous indignation against John. No doubt the boy had gone "to hidey." Her heart softened. Her only thought was to give him his breakfast and get him away to work. She impatiently secured a lock of red hair which fluttered in the morning breeze, and with a mysterious persuasiveness, called,—

" Jack ! "

Receiving no reply, she returned to the garden, looked into the little back house, behind the

faggots, and up in the lilac-bush. Irritated at not finding the boy in any of these obvious hiding-places, she called again,—

“Jack, you little fool. Come out avore your vather do come down. Jack! ’t ’ull sar ’ee well-right if thee vather do catch thee.”

At a quarter to six, John Sandboy, who had been more merry than wise on the previous night, and with the morning inclined to be penitential and severe on folly, stood in the doorway.

“Jack!”

“Lef the bwoy alone,” cried the mother. “There’s wo’se fools ’an he.”

“Just let I vind the little stick,” menaced John between his teeth.

It was easier to find the stick than Johnny. They inquired of the labourer passing to his work, and of Josiah on his way to the moor to fetch in his cows ; but nobody had seen the delinquent. He was not in his field. “He’ve a-urned off to Upton again,” cried the father. “Now I’ll jus’——”

“No you wunt,” interrupted Mrs. Sandboy.

Then Sutton became agitated with a pleasant excitement. Everybody came to inquire—suggest—or to enjoy the enormity of Johnny’s guilt. Mr. John Culliford came down on his cob, and talked loudly by the garden-hatch. Abraham, Josiah, Mrs. Carew, all Sutton ran out of doors to hear the

farmer threaten. "I'll dust the jacket o' un," cried Mr. John Culliford. "I'll warr'nt he will," said all the parish. "He will," added Josiah. For to see Mr. John Culliford with a face so red as a turkey-cock was so good as a play. And Mrs. Sandboy was a goodish bit put out; to be sure she was—poor 'ooman. Simple souls of Sutton! who found in real life their never-ceasing drama. Even Girt-gran-dadder, dimly conscious of calamity afoot, laid a palsied hand to his deaf ear and tried to listen.

By noon it was an accepted fact that the boy could not be hiding, but had run away; and neighbours who looked in, touched by the old man's look of inquiry, shouted to him again and again.

"Let I," said Josiah, making a trumpet of his hands.

"Johnny's gone."

"Eh, eh? Cow's harn. Dear life then! Cow's harn."

"No, no, Girt-gran-dadder. Johnny's gone—gone."

A fleeting intelligence flitted over the old man's face.

"Eh? gone! Dear, dear," he murmured. "Too young. Too young. An' he wur the light o' my eyes—the light o' my eyes."

Impossible to reach his understanding! The

most persistent gave up the attempt in despair, and left him in peace, basking in his arm-chair.

But soon the sky began to put on mourning. The sun went in. A cloud, as black as a hearse came looming above the hill-top. The wind sighed ; and a great raindrop struck the window-pane.

" We mus' have in the wold man, I spwose," said Mrs. Sandboy discontentedly. " He'll get so cold as a stwone else."

But the old man was as cold as clay !

On the testimony of the weather-beaten stone at Johnny's head it was fourteen miles to Cheddar ; and he meant to wait until the caravans had passed, and then to follow them at a respectful distance. The road was straight, and he could see either way for miles. The furze was in flower ; cobwebs glistened in the sun ; and he sat upon the grass and quenched his thirst with sorrel leaves. He had no fear of pursuit. The place was sacred to solitude. A hare went lopping along the road without minding him, and a curlew whistled overhead.

Hours passed. The caravans did not come, and at last he fell asleep. Then in the distance arose a cloud of white dust, and a coach-and-four came whirling along the road from Sutton. Drawing

near, it went more slowly, and the gentleman who drove pointed with his whip to the blue sea far away beyond the yellow gorse. As they passed, catching sight of a heap of smock and corduroy amongst the ranker grasses which fringed the king's highway, he humorously caught Johnny a cut with the whip. Simultaneously a servant in livery blew a blast upon his horn. Perplexed and frightened, Johnny sprang to his feet as if he had been answering the last trump.

The people on the coach all looked back and laughed, whilst the boy stood in the road and stared at them. The driver wore a drab coat with large buttons, and beside him sat a lady. There were two other ladies, both quite young, and several gentlemen; amongst whom one in particular, a little, sharp-featured man with a shaven face, attracted Johnny's attention. And surely the portly figure at the back of the coach could be no other than Mr. Poltimore himself!

The suddenness of the awakening, the recognition of this familiar but awe-inspiring personage, and the discomfort of hunger, all depressed Johnny. He had come out in the morning as fresh as a daisy and full of hope, convinced that he should find immediate work as a fool. But having slept upon the idea, he found it a little crumpled. The caravans had not come. It was

fourteen miles to Cheddar, and the road unknown.

Upon mature consideration it appeared imperative to return to Sutton ; but modestly, and with the shades of evening, for although he felt certain of a warm reception, one day's absence cannot deserve a triumph. Meanwhile, he must do something for a living. A bumble-bee went flying across the road, and he knocked it down with his hat, to steal its honey-bag. Wandering upon the down, in a thorn-bush he found a thrush's nest, with four blue eggs. These he broke in the palm of his hand and swallowed the yellow yolks. Then he heard voices and laughter quite close to him, and crawling through an overhanging brake, he saw some of the party of the coach busily unpacking a luncheon-basket in the seclusion of an abandoned gravel-pit. Others walked away over the down. The gentleman who had been driving and another—it *was* Mr. Poltimore—were standing apart, engaged in conversation. They were just below, and Johnny could hear every word.

"Then everybody in Sutton is safe, Poltimore?"

"Certainly, my Lord."

"What cottage is that at the entrance to the village?"

"Oh, that—that's a place a man called Sandboy put up, my Lord."

"Got a vote?"

"Oh no, my Lord. Very infirm old man. We let him put up a cottage some years ago, my Lord. Mr. Culliford wanted him there."

"You've got an acknowledgment, Poltimore, I suppose?"

"I think you may trust me for that, my Lord."

Mr. Poltimore was ever so magnificent, for obsequiousness only added to the importance of that great man. A raised-pie had just been taken from the basket, when Johnny found himself suddenly gripped by the small of the leg and dragged out of the brake. He struggled and kicked without avail. Thorns and brambles pulled his smock over his head, rendering him powerless; until lightly lifted to his feet, his raiment readjusted, Johnny stood disclosed clutching his bundle in his left hand. A group of gentlefolk surrounded him. Attracted by the laughter, his Lordship and Mr. Poltimore came strolling out of the gravel-pit.

"How d'you do? How d'you do?" cordially cried the little shaven man, taking the boy's hand in the style of a genial host. "So glad you came. We had almost given you up. Take a seat."

He pointed to a clump of gorse in the form of a settee, and all the company laughed. They laughed at everything the little man did, and louder still when he did nothing; because it was

not so much what he did, but the way he did it. Johnny looked at the prickles and thought him a fool.

“ What have you got in your bundle ? ”

The inquiry was confidential, and everybody roared. But Johnny was silent, whilst the little man appropriated his property, deftly untied the red handkerchief, and held up a pair of Sunday boots.

“ They do not want tapping,” he said, looking critically at the hob-nailed soles. Then, suddenly becoming deeply serious, he handed them back with the air of a Colonial Bishop bestowing a Bible. “ Take them, my boy—take them to your dear mother.”

“ What’s your name, boy ? ”

“ Tell his Lordship your name, boy,” said Mr. Poltimore pompously.

“ John Zan’boy, Zir.”

“ Where do you live ? ”

“ To Zutton, Zir.”

“ Whose house do you live in ? ”

“ Girt-gran-dadder’s, Zir.”

“ Not his own house, boy.”

“ Ees ’tes, Zir. He put un up, Zir.”

His Lordship laughed, and Mr. Poltimore looked uncomfortable. But the little man set everybody at rest. Mounting an anthill, he delivered an im-

promptu political oration of which Johnny was the subject. He referred to him as the future electorate. He derided, menaced, and cajoled him: described him as the Charybdis which would whirl his native land into revolution, and the Scylla upon which the country must some day split. And Johnny listened with his mouth open, just as if he had been in church.

"But how," asked the orator, indicating Johnny, with his forefinger, "how are we to cope with this hydra-headed monster which threatens to destroy society? My friends, but one way is open to us. We must undermine his future independence by inviting him to lunch."

The suggestion was received with acclamation. "Lunch! Yes. Ask him to lunch."

They led Johnny into the gravel-pit, reluctant, but his power of resistance paralysed by the impressive presence of Mr. Poltimore. They enthroned him on a broken wheel-barrow. A gravel-shelf was the dais, the overhanging thorn a canopy, and under the title of King Demos they fed him from the raised-pie and fêted him with champagne. His Lordship laughed—and Mr. Poltimore laughed too. His Lordship drank to Johnny—and Mr. Poltimore drank also. But Johnny accepted both food and homage with the gravity of an Indian chief.

"Hark! What is that?"

"It is undoubtedly thunder, my Lord," replied Mr. Poltimore.

"We shall have a storm. I think we had better get back to the coach. It is raining already."

There was a flash of lightning, a nearer clap of thunder, and big rain-drops began to fall. The ladies were in consternation, and hurried to the coach for wraps. The men rapidly repacked the baskets and ran with them across the down. In five minutes the place was as quiet as of old, and the coach a mere speck upon the distant road.

Johnny lost heart. He had suffered hunger, and the laughter of a strange race. Thunder he could never abide; and the caravans had not come. The rain came down in torrents, trickling into yellow pools in the bottom of the pit; and he ran out, and crept into the gorse, and was afraid.

The storm passed quickly over. But it was evening before Johnny ventured home to Sutton, and then he loitered in the twilight by the churchyard wall. Although it was late, villagers clustered in groups upon the causeway, or went flitting to and fro across the road like shades. He felt sure they were talking of him. Then some one went into his cottage; and he thought the folk had seen him and sent to tell.

But nothing happened as he anticipated. His

father did not go round the fields to appear below him and cut off his retreat. His mother did not come traipsing down the street, the little stick ostentatiously hidden under her white apron. There was something very strange in Sutton.

From beneath the yew tree in Josiah's garden came the sound of Mrs. Clarke's voice, moralising for his benefit.

"Why, an' if there idden that good-for-nothen little twoad Johnny a'ter all," she said.

"An' zo 'tes," chimed in a neighbour, quickly enough to claim part of the merit of the discovery

"'Twur terr'ble wrong for childern to gie their poor parents so much trouble."

"Zo 'twur."

"'T 'ud sar they well right if their vathers an' mothers was to shut the door upon they."

"Zoo 't'ood."

"But 't'ull all come back to 'em zome day."

"Zoo 't'ooll."

"Ay. Do come back in thought in a'ter life zo zure as the light."

"Zoo do."

Then she took Johnny by the hand to lead him home, and he felt the mystery of these strange manners. The earth smelt sweet after the rain. A lilac bough, still dripping wet, had been beaten down upon the hatch, and the gilawfers planted

for the bees filled the air with fragrance. But the upstairs windows, small and square under the overhanging thatch, were as black as death ; and underneath, by the row of bee-butts, dimly visible through the dusk, crouched Grammer.

" She's a tellen the bees."

Josiah's wife, still holding the boy's hand, stood in the path, silent and respectful, as if fearing to interrupt a ceremony.

The old woman passed from butt to butt, laying her lips close to the mouth of each.

" The wold man's a-gone," she said. " The wold man's a-tookt to last."

Mrs. Clarke lifted the latch without knocking, like a person fearing to awaken a sleeper. Girt-gran-dadder's knob-headed sticks were lying on his empty chair.

" Here's Johnny a-comed back," whispered the neighbour.

" But some 'll never come back."

And nobody was angry.

" The bwoy mus' be main an' hungry," sighed his mother.

CHAPTER XV

MR. PERCIVAL'S PROPOSAL

FROM that day in spring when Marion found her father awaiting her by the willow trees, a change was noticeable in his demeanour towards her. He watched her with a solicitude quite womanly in its tenderness, but without giving the slightest indication of its foundation. Her quick sensibility detected the presence of some hidden cogitation, which delicacy forbade him to disclose, but whether prompted by hope or fear she could not tell. Sometimes she thought he had learnt of her love for Hensley, from some source enjoining silence on his sense of honour. Instinctively her thoughts turned to Mr. Percival, and she regarded that energetic cleric with a suspicion and resentment which even his reforms had never awakened in the heart of Mr John Culliford. Then she dismissed these doubts as unfounded and unfair, and a perception of their injustice made her more than usually kind to this frequent visitor.

Thus several weeks elapsed without affording a single opportunity of meeting her lover. Some-

times of an evening she saw him ride away across the moor to Bridgetown ; and then she would wait, often until long after midnight, listening for his return. She heard the sound of his horse's hoofs upon the road ; and from her window, in the moonlight or the uncertain dusk of a summer night, she caught sight of a horseman riding rapidly between the trees. He might have been a phantom, so quickly did he pass—so still and lonely did he leave the night. Then her heart sank. Her love seemed destined to be all as brief and ineffectual. Doubtless he must misapprehend her absence from their former haunts. He thought her fickle, inconstant, and these journeys to Bridgetown were the consequence of her apparent neglect. At times she resolved to frankly tell her father, trusting all to his affection and the power of her surpassing love. But with the daylight her courage was gone ; and upon their walks, now more regular than ever, she dared not utter a single word.

The intended proposal of Mr. Percival, to which her father had referred, remained a secret for some little time. Humorously surrounded with mystery, a mighty scheme awaiting maturity, it became the subject of banter amongst them, until one evening towards the end of June it was understood to be ripe for disclosure.

They were all three sitting together in a bower

amongst the filbert bushes. Josiah's milk-cart had driven home some time ago, and the shouts of children at play came from the village street. Also the voices of Abraham and Mrs. Clarke corroborating each other's opinion of the weather over a garden hedge; then a horseman passed through the parish and across the moor. The happy contentment of a summer evening in Sutton was very sweet.

"I have been contemplating another surprise for Sutton, Miss Marion," said Mr. Percival gaily. "Only I am afraid of shocking Mr. John Culliford. I want to start a school. Every child ought to be able to read and write, although of course that's a wild idea. I expressed that opinion to Abraham Bartlett the other day, but he thinks that if the lower orders ever learn to write they will become addicted to forgery."

He leant back against the branches and laughed. The necessity to build a barn and granary had by no means diminished his zeal, and he was as full of hope as ever.

"He says that reading is very well for gentle-folk, or to look at the almanac, or to see the markets, or for a parish clerk; but if the labouring classes could read they wouldn't have anything to read, and they'd waste their time reading it. Abraham says, 'he doesn't read hisself, not outside o' church, not once in a twelvemonth.'"

His good-humoured mimicry of Abraham increased their merriment, and he continued :—

“ But I do not live in fear of Abraham. The man is by nature obdurate, but the parish clerk is distinctly human. I have explained to him the dignity of his ancient office, and he cuts the churchyard grass. Moreover, being appointed to look after my tithes with a sufficient emolument, he admits that he never liked the look of beasts in the churchyard, and has no fear of Popery so long as he is clerk. Oh ! they are a good sort of people ! They will all come round in time. But Mr. John Culliford would scent Popery in a school of mine at once. Then Josiah ‘ wouldn’t zee no call to make no change—not for the present,’ and Josiah’s little family is evidently pre-ordained to be the backbone of a Sutton school.”

“ Then how do you intend to manage ? ” asked the girl.

“ I want you to be mistress for a time.”

“ Me ! ”

Mistaking surprise for disinclination, he quickly went on to explain.

“ Of course I know I am asking a great favour. But I would see that it should not be too great a tax upon you. And in a very short time we could make some new arrangement.”

“ But could I do it, do you think ? ”

"If only you would condescend to do it," he said, with a warmth of manner which almost startled her. "But I am afraid you will find it chiefly a dull routine of A B C."

From the first moment she was fascinated with the idea. She seized upon it as a child upon a new game. She fell in love with it at first sight. Here was an occupation for the many hours of unproductive leisure which sometimes troubled her conscience—a relief from the sense of uselessness which often oppressed her. Even the position of authority possessed its charm, and she already pictured herself the beneficent ruler of a happy realm. Her only desire was to begin at once. And indeed they discovered little reason for delay, although they sat discussing details until the dusk, when Mr. Percival took his leave.

Contrary to his usual custom, Mr. Burt made no movement to go indoors, but drew Marion closer to his side and kissed her. Although a gentle tenderness smiled through his every action, such demonstration of affection was rare, kisses being reserved as the conventional caress of night and morning. It was the consummation of the solicitude he had of late displayed, and she remained silent, feeling sure that he would presently speak to her.

In the village a woman's shrill voice called in a

loitering child. Then the shutting of a door, and everything became still.

"The years have rolled by," he said quietly. "You are a woman, and I—am getting an old man."

"Oh no, Father."

"More than three-score years. It is well to examine these things calmly, and realize the truth. I might be called at any moment. Indeed, I have long known it likely that I may be taken suddenly, without illness or warning. The thought has no terrors for me ; nor do I think it wisdom to hide or veil what science can reveal. My only anxiety is about you, Marion. Not for your material welfare, for indeed you will possess enough for all your wants. But you will be alone—almost, I might say, without a friend in the world. I should be content if I could see you in the keeping of some good-hearted man."

A sudden impulse leapt within her heart, now, in this moment of mutual confidence, to tell her love. But emotion choked her utterance. She could not even find words to express the pain he was causing her.

"You will never know necessity. There is money which I have never touched. I have asked Mr. Percival to act for you ; and if anything should happen, you will give him the key of the old bureau—you like him?"

His manner was so eager that it called forth an answer without hesitation. The question seemed to imply a doubt ; and, anxious to dismiss a subject which gave her so much distress, she spoke with unwonted feeling :—

“ Oh, yes ; I like him very much.”

“ He is a gentleman of good family, and a scholar, though scarcely a ripe one,” said the old man, weighing each word with slow deliberation. “ He is zealous, but not self-seeking, and, I think, has already given evidence that he is a good-hearted man.”

His unconscious repetition of these words startled her. She caught a glimpse of the thought, hitherto nidden and now unintentionally discovered, which was at the spring of his solicitude. And then, as if thinking aloud, he gave utterance to strange reflections, foreign to all she knew of his philosophy of life.

“ Though, as to that, his family is no better than my own. I was myself a clergyman of the Established Church for many years.” He paused, as if overcoming an impulse to tell more of his history. “ It is time to go indoors,” he said, rising from his seat.

He had been dreaming that Marion might marry Mr. Percival.

The full moon was high above the moor when

Marion glanced from her window that night. Between the house and the wall lay a gravel-path and a narrow shrubbery. The light shone upon the flat coping stones, and glistened upon the long laurel leaves jutting above the wall. The elms by the hill-side were still. Everything was silent, and not a sigh came from the willows or the sedge.

In contrast with this quietude of Nature, the girl stood trembling with conflicting emotions. It was no time for sleep. Every sensibility was aroused. She gently raised the window to drink the cool air, laden with the scent of pinks and wallflowers. Her joy at the anticipation of the school had quickly fled. She could not accept it. Numberless little attentions on the part of Mr. Percival, unheeded at the time, now assumed importance ; and this was the greatest of them all. Even her father, so single in his thoughts and ever pre-occupied, had noticed them.

Suddenly she felt the full import of her father's references to himself. The knowledge so calmly accepted must have been acquired upon those journeys to the doctor at Bridgetown. And with what sweet resignation he spoke of it ! The pathos, the gentleness of that solitary life melted her heart. She burst into tears. Bitterly she accused herself of deceit ; and the sacrifice of love seemed easy in the exaltation of her filial affection. She would

never act contrary to his wishes, never inflict upon him a care. And yet, by a sort of double consciousness, her ears, alert as sentinels, were listening for her lover's return.

She knew it was he who rode through the village that evening whilst she was in the bower. A coverlet of white mist, spreading over the lower part of the moor, crept towards Sutton like a slowly advancing flood. She peered into this impenetrable cloud. Between it and the house the dusty summer road shone as clear as day. The spirit of self-sacrifice was still upon her; and she would give up all to ensure her father's happiness—all but the fond joy of looking upon her lover with the eyes of love.

At last from the distance came a sound, faint but regular, like the ticking of a watch. As it drew near, her heart beat fast. He was coming at last. As his figure loomed out of the mist, with instinctive modesty or fear she withdrew, and stood behind the blind, watching between it and the window-post.

By the willows he drew rein, and walked his horse slowly down the white road. He appeared to be looking at the house; and although he had never acted in this way before, it seemed quite natural. How well she could understand such love-prompted loitering — his expression of the

passion which kept her there that night. But by the entrance to the field in which the Yeomanry had exercised, he dismounted, and tied his horse to the gate.

Breathless she waited. Again she raised the blind, and looked into the night, and listened. There came a stealthy step upon the gravel walk, and he stood beneath the low window quite close to her.

"I saw your shadow on the blind," he whispered. "Come down and talk to me."

"No, no," she answered, with the quick decision of fear.

"You have forgotten me. I have not seen you for an age."

She sighed beneath the oppression of an unspeakable desire and the apprehension of some unknown evil.

"I could not."

"You do not love me. You have left me," he said almost resentfully. "You could come easily enough. Every one has been asleep for hours. There is no danger if you cared to come. Come! Just for one minute, Marion. Come! I want to speak to you."

His manner changing to tender supplication touched her heart. She withdrew from the window and stood one moment by her bedside.

It might be done. She would not pass her father's room, which was upon the other side of the house, remote from the stairs, and looking out upon the village. Even though love must cease, she could not belie her heart to be unkind. She could not leave him suddenly without a word. Almost mechanically she extinguished the candle ; then noiselessly stepped out into the passage. Everything in the house was still. Carried upon an irresistible flood of longing, she hastened downstairs, opened the door, and went into the porch

He already waited there.

With the warmth of his burning kisses upon her lips, all her fears and sorrows were dispelled and forgotten. Love was all-sufficing, and took possession of her being. The very air she breathed was passion-laden, and her pulses throbbed. They sat upon the stone seat within the porch on the side where the moonlight fell, and she hid her face upon his shoulder with her arms around his neck.

"Where have you been so long?"

"Father has always wanted me."

"But I have wanted you also. I haven't been able to stand the place during the last few weeks."

The words troubled her. They breathed that spirit of instability which had always been so unintelligible, and jarred upon her senses like a dis-

cordant note in the music of love. She raised her head and looked at him. The effort of thus meeting him had overcome her timidity and removed constraint. Unasked she pressed her lips upon his cheek and kissed him again and again.

"Marion," he whispered eagerly; "you must not forsake me like this. When you come to see me I can go on well enough. But if you leave me, I have nothing left to care for; if I cannot have love, I must have excitement. I go in despair and make a fool of myself."

"You know I would come if I could."

"How do I know? You do not come. Have you ever told your father?"

"Never. And that often troubles me, because——"

"It would be of no use. He would never consent."

"But I ought to tell him. And he is so good——"

"That is just it. I am no Puritan, and he would think of me with horror. And what would you do if he knew and forbade you to see me? Would you obey? Or would you come to me? That would be the only way. How easy it would be. I could fetch you any night, and you could come down like this. We could go abroad. Come, Marion! Say you will come."

The white, cold mist of the fen was drawing near. She shivered, and hastily rose to go. The suggestion, so abrupt and unexpected, horrified her ; but he held her hand.

“Wait one moment, Marion. How can I help wishing it when I love you so much ? When will you come again ? Not to-morrow, but the night after, I could come much earlier. You see it is quite safe. I would walk down over the hill, and nobody can disturb us. I will come again to the window, and then you must be ready to come down.”

She did not answer. Although she had so easily done this, she could not calmly contemplate it and promise.

“You must. You will, I know you will.” Again he pressed her in his arms, and her hesitation melted in the warmth of his embrace.

“I must go,” she faltered. “How chilly it has become, and your coat is quite moist.”

“Good-bye ! I think of going to Bridgetown to live. I cannot stand these Cullifords. But I will tell you then.”

Thus they parted ; and she crept safely back to her room. No one in the house had stirred, and yet her soul was haunted by a sense of insecurity. Was it the night, or the danger, which made the stolen interview so different to their noonday

rambles in the copse and on the down? The joy of romance had made way for the restless aching of reality. And somewhere in the depth of her heart was an undefined misgiving of his love. She sat down upon the bed, so dainty white in the uncertain light. She did not want to see him go away.

Suddenly the sound of voices, raised in altercation, fell upon her ear. She hurried to the window. The horse was still tied to the gate, but between it and her lover stood a dark figure. The man appeared to be begging, and being refused poured forth a torrent of angry speech. She could not catch the words. Then Mr. Hensley struck him, and he fell.

She saw her lover quietly mount his horse and ride away.

The whole scene was enacted more rapidly than it can be written. A minute later the figure rose, and as it shuffled by towards the village, she recognised the fustian coat of John Sandboy.

CHAPTER XVI

A PRETTY UPSTORE

How sweet it was that summer when the air was fragrant with the scent of hay, and through the open window Marion could hear the distant voices of men and women folks, as they sat at noon in the shade of the hedgerow and elm trees for a bite and a drop, and a rest out of the sun! There the village scandals were raked up and turned over like the hay. But there was no sound of malice or ill-will; only talk and laughter as if life had no sorrow too deep for mirth to heal. And at dusk the wagons laden with singing workers rattled home through the village.

Suddenly one evening, just at dark, there was a great stir in Sutton, and all the villagers were called out of doors by the sound of a woman's screams. Abraham ran. So did Josiah, and Mrs. Carew popped out into the street. The point of interest was the Sandboy cottage. John Sandboy had returned late from a warm day's work necessitating frequent libations, and was standing in the doorway, his arms bare, his yellow trousers bound with

leathern straps below the knee. Grammer was moaning amongst the hives, whilst Mrs. Sandboy stood with her back against the hatch. It was she who screamed loudest, for Tamsin, the object of her father's wrath, was standing in the road crying as if her heart would break.

"Then I wun't bide at home to be beät about. I wun't come where I be'n't a-wanted," retorted the girl defiantly between her tears.

The disturbance had attracted Mr. Burt, and Marion followed him, but waited at some little distance.

"What is it? What is the matter?" he repeated in his nervous way, hesitating on the borders of the little crowd in anxiety to ascertain the truth, so that he might expostulate with force or condemn with justice.

"'Tes Mrs. Culliford have a-bundled off Tamsin pack an' fardel," explained Josiah.

"An' John Zandboy comed home a bit fresh-like an' gi'ed the maid a leatheren wi' the wold man's stick," added Abraham.

"Did he indeed strike her in that manner?" said Mr. Burt, making his way forward.

"I wun't have the maid a-beat," cried Mrs. Sandboy, taking shrill courage at this sympathy. "If the maid have a-lost her place, what odds is it to he?—whv he never coo'dn' keep a place more 'an

vive minutes. If we hadn' a-got the house over our heads, we should a-bin' out o' parish years agone. Tidden vor what he do sar ; or if he do, he don't bring it home ——”

Incensed by these taunts John Sandboy advanced towards the hatch.

His wife, who only domineered when John was sober, ran screaming into the road, and Mr. Burt availed himself of that moment to intervene.

“Now, Sandboy, my good fellow! this is too bad. Your violence (for such an action cannot be regarded as reasonable correction, justified by ill-conduct on the part of your daughter) has disturbed the whole parish. How much better, more decent and effectual in every way to have spoken to her kindly but with firmness——”

John, excited with drink and the presence of the little group of neighbours, resentful of interference, angrily interrupted :—

“What odds is it to you or any other man I should like to know. I ben't beholden to you, not as I do know. You look a'ter your own maid. That 'll take ee all your time by all accounts——”

“John! John! whatever be a-tellen o'?” shrieked Mrs. Sandboy, “Whatever be a-zayen o' to gen'levolk.”

“I don't care nothen at all about gen'levolk. I never didn' get no good out o' gen'levolk. Gen'le-

volk or poor volk, 'tes all as one. Let un look a'ter his own maid I tell 'ee——

"Why she do come down in the night to sweet hearty an' sit in porch wi' un. I zeed 'em wi' my own eyes, as they stood in the moonlight out 'pon path avore they parted. She an' Mr. Hensley. I spoke to the man as he went away. Perty goings-ons at midnight, wi' his ho'se a-tied up to the Hammead gate. Let every man look a'ter his own I zay; lef alone other volk. That's what I do zay."

Having shot his bolt, and somewhat sobered himself in the process, he turned and went into the cottage, slamming the door behind him. From the distance Marion heard every word; then, unobserved she fled to the privacy of her own room. How terrible it had sounded thus coarsely shouted to the wind! She thought she could never face the world again. And how would she be able to meet her father? She threw herself upon the bed and hid her face in the pillow.

There was silence in the little group, for nobody knew what to say, and presently Mrs. Sandboy quietly crept indoors; Tamsin waited awhile by the lilac-bush. But all was quiet within the cottage, and finding no further excitement the villagers dispersed. Thus in spite of the sweet summer there were aching hearts in Sutton that night.

How should Marion meet her father? Would he reproach, or regard her with that grave kindness which had so often quelled her spirit as a child? The act, so natural to her romantic love, now presented itself before her in all its compromising immodesty. She saw it with the eyes of other people. She heard their coarse comments, their laughter and their scorn. She felt the full effect of that unreflecting folly, falling with the suddenness of an unexpected blow upon her father's gentle affection.

The door closed behind him and she attentively listened. He waited a few moments by the stairs, as if in doubt, and then went into the library. Perhaps he would presently call her. A long while she waited, intent to catch the slightest sound, until the silence of the house became quite oppressive and filled her heart with a vague misgiving. She wanted to go down to him—to throw her arms around his neck—to tell him all her thoughts, her hopes, her love. Out of his own experience, so clearly told in her mother's letters, he would understand and pity her. And yet she could not do this. No such display of emotion had ever taken place between them; and from early childhood the unbroken current of their love, as if too deep for demonstration, had flowed smoothly on.

Then, as the time passed, and still he did not move, the undefined doubt which troubled her

began to assume form. The recent conversation in the bower had made a profound impression upon her. The recollection of his illness on the hill arose vividly before her imagination. That had followed a season of great excitement. Suddenly she pictured him ill, alone, and in need of help. Trembling with fear, without a moment's hesitation she hastened downstairs, and went into the library.

Upon his writing-table stood two tall silver candlesticks, and as usual he had lighted the candles as if to read. One was consumed to the socket ; the other, untended, was running to waste, and the tallow overflowed upon his papers. He had not drawn his chair up to the table, but was sitting remote, an elbow resting on his knee, his grey head upon his hand. As she entered he raised his head and looked at her intently ; but the eager hope of his first glance was quickly clouded by anxiety.

"I came down to speak to you, Father."

Without rising he extended a hand and drew forward a chair.

She sat beside him and waited, but he did not speak.

"I have wanted to tell you for a long time," she faltered, "but I—I could not."

Again his eyes met hers in sad reproach.

"It is not all true that was said," she continued

eagerly. "I have seen him very little of late. Once—one night, I went into the garden to speak to him, when he—when he was returning from Bridgetown. I could not help it. I wanted to speak to him so much. We—I love him so much."

He moved uneasily and moaned. "I have been blind—blind—blind," he said as if to himself. "For a moment I foresaw this ; and then I thought it impossible. I have undertaken a task beyond my power—beyond my strength."

Overcome by his distress he hid his face in his hands and wept. She could have borne his rebuke, or at least have combated it ; but his self-reproach possessed a quality of tenderness which melted opposition. Carried away by feelings of love and gratitude, she threw herself upon the floor at his feet and clasped his knees.

"My poor child !" he said, "I could with greater resignation follow you to the grave than see you united to such a man."

"You scarcely know him, Father."

As he thought of Hensley, the uncompromising hatred of unrighteousness which underlay the old man's gentleness burst forth in incoherent indignation.

"He is a dissolute prodigal, a heartless libertine—one upon whom the bonds of affection have never——"

To the girl this sounded like injustice. She could not repress the reply prompted by the loyalty of her love.

"You are deceived, Father," she said quickly. "You misapprehend him entirely. How can you know since you have never talked to him? He has been foolish and prodigal, but he recognises this. From his follies he has gained experience. He desires to lead a better life. That was why he came to Sutton—to equip himself for a more useful career, and yet you condemn him unheard. You make these accusations without knowing the state of his mind."

Gently but with firmness he placed his hand upon her arm to raise her from the floor. She was bordering upon revolt, and to her the action was an expression of disapproval. He rejected then the outburst of affection, which had brought her to his feet. She rose, crossed the room, and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, with her back towards him.

"If I do not know him—I know of him, alas! too much," he said, in a voice deep with sorrow.

"You can only know what you have heard. You cannot judge of what he is really like. Has Mr. Percival been speaking of him behind his back? that you believe so much to his detriment so readily. How dare he do so? Of a man he

scarcely knows. If he believes it true, he should seek to reform him. He should offer him advice and assistance. Is this the charity of which we have heard so often ? ”

In her excitement she had turned, and the last sentence uttered with startling vehemence sounded like a taunt directed against her father. A moment later how gladly she would have recalled it. And yet the sense of their injustice, for her thoughts were bitter against Mr. Percival, still rankled in her heart.

But her father had regained his customary self-control. He seemed incapable of being angry with her ; and only when speaking of Hensley had his indignation overcome him.

“ We will not talk more of this to-night,” he said quietly. “ It is already late. You shall only promise me one thing, Marion. It is a small request where your future happiness is concerned. Tell me that you will not again meet Mr. Hensley until we have calmly discussed this matter. I shall have much to tell you. But this is all so sudden, that I cannot speak of it to-night. I will choose my own time. But I will tell you. Yes, I will tell you.”

There was a strange sympathy in his tone, a pity springing from experience, and she felt that he understood her sorrow.

“ Will you promise ? ”

"Yes, Father. I promise."

"It shall not be long. Come. It is very late."

Bidding her good-night, he kissed her with his usual kindness and serenity. There was nothing to forgive, no quarrel to make up. In her promise he placed implicit trust, and her heart drew comfort from this confidence. But she knew that he had determined to tell her his own story—that story of love, and opposition, and constancy of which she had caught glimpses in the letters.

CHAPTER XVII

"A SONG O' SIXPENCE"

ONE day in that same week Mrs. Carew, hearing the sound of wheels, ran to the little side window in time to catch sight of Mr. Poltimore's carriage passing up the street. On all such occasions the important questions were, "Where would it stop?" "Would Mr. Poltimore get out?" "How long would he stay?"

Mrs. Carew had been known to watch for hours when Mr. Poltimore remained long with Josiah, or lingered under Abraham's roof. But to-day he passed both farms. "Ah! He must have been up to the Manor House," she told herself. And then, although the good woman could scarcely believe her eyes, the carriage drew in before the Sandboy hatch; the great man alighted—and went in.

Mrs. Carew could not divine his errand.

The cottage door was open, and Mr. Poltimore was too important to knock. Grammer, overawed by the sudden appearance of this unlooked-for visitor, rose from her chair and curtsied. Mrs. Sandboy, who answered his questions, bobbed an obeisance at every word.

"Good morning. Good morning. Husband in?"

"Just across in mead, Zir."

"Then run and fetch him, my good woman. Tell him Mr. Poltimore is desirous to speak to him."

Grammer, standing by the open hearth, shrewdly watched with suspicion as Mr. Poltimore glanced around the house. The floor was irregularly pitched with pebbles. The chimney, being of insufficient height, smoked in a high wind, so that the ceiling was as black as a hat. In the little square window here and there a crazy pane was patched with paper. Certainly the Sandboy abode was poor and squalid, although the row of plates upon the dresser was shining clean.

Presently John Sandboy entered in haste, his arms bare as he had left his work. Mr. Poltimore wore top boots and breeches, and a blue cut-away coat with brass buttons.

When Mr. Poltimore had business he loved to treat the matter largely and talk of his Lordship.

"Good morning, Sandboy," he said with genial condescension.

"Marnen, Zir," said John, touching his forelock in anticipation of an odd job.

"I've been a long time coming, Sandboy. I left you alone as long as I could, but as I was passing through Sutton I embraced the opportunity. The old man is dead, they tell me."

"Oh, ay, Zir. Dead an' buried," replied John.

"Well, what are we to say about the cottage? I said to his Lordship that we wouldn't disturb the old man."

"The cottage?" said Sandboy, raising his hand to his forehead in perplexity.

"Yes. You must think yourself a lucky fellow, Sandboy, and no mistake. Here you've been living free all these years. But you have to thank me for that. Years ago his Lordship said to me, 'Poltimore! what's that cottage? They ought to pay something.'" (As primitive man imagined an anthropomorphous God, so in his imitation, the agent represented his Lordship as a glorified Mr. Poltimore.) "But I said, 'We can leave them alone, my Lord.' I said, 'The man is very old, and when he drops off I will make some fair arrangement.' Now what shall we say? Your grandfather put up the house here on his Lordship's land, and of course his Lordship could have turned you out if he liked. But, eh—oh well!—say sixpence a week; and you may trust me to see you're not hurt by it. I'll do some repairs."

At this astounding proposition the Sandboy household was in consternation. For years it had been the accepted belief in Sutton that by lapse of time the cottage had gained a title. Hundreds of times this had been the subject of discussion.

"Oh ay, that's safe enough," said Abraham. "To be zure," replied Josiah. And nobody had ever felt the slightest doubt upon the matter.

"You ca'n't claim it. You ca'n't claim it," piped Grammer in her shrill voice.

"Hold thee noise," cried John Sandboy angrily. Although he sometimes succumbed to feminine opposition, he invariably resented support.

"I ben't a-gwain to pay no zixpence."

"Then his Lordship will turn you out. It will be my duty, acting for his Lordship, to serve you with a notice to quit. But take the advice of one who wishes you well. Get any foolish notion out of your head that the land can't be claimed. Pay a small rent, and I'll do the place up. There, I was never an arbitrary man. Take a few days to think. Why, man alive, you'd be better off under his Lordship. I shall be here again in a fortnight, and then I'll see you again."

Thus Mr. Poltimore hastily withdrew; but as his carriage rolled out of Sutton, Grammer crept down to the garden path, and muttered between her teeth. Abraham saw her, and harboured uncanny thoughts.

The Sandboy family was not popular in the village. The loafing habits of John begot doubts as to his honesty; and Grammer's witch-like ways awakened fears even in folk who disclaimed belief

in witchcraft. Years ago, when Abraham Bartlett had the difference with the old John Sandboy, not Girt-gran-dadder, but Grammer’s man, over the eighteenpence about the shrouding the elm trees, Abraham was hag-rod every night of his life about two “in marnen.” A witch came on a “dree-lagged milken stool, an’ sot ’pon Abraham’s chest, as Abraham mid be a-lying on the back o’ un like.” Whether she turned Abraham on his back like a sheep, or whether he might be so lying at the time, was more than he could swear. But he could take his oath to the three-legged milking stool. For the old hag wouldn’t sit still. She bumped up and down for all the world as if she were riding a trot. She had a “taft” upon that stool, and when it tilted upon one leg you would have thought it was a “teddy dibble” running between your ribs. But the most wonderfulest thing was, that when Abraham awoke all in a sweat and his chest so sore as if he were black and blue—there was nothing !

This treatment had made Abraham most terrible bad in his inside, and brought on a sort of hesitation-like in his stomach, so that he pitched away and got so poor that he were little better than a shadow, and sang the Amens in a voice “so hoarse as a crow.” And if that wasn’t old Grammer, ’tes a very funny thing. For no sooner did Abraham pay

the eighteenpence than he slept as sound as a seabem-sleeper, and began to get the good of his victuals.

But as casting suspicion upon Grammer, Josiah's experience was still more convincing. When he was up a hardish lad and without thought, one year of a panshard day, he got behind hedge over-right the cottage to throw stones at the door. It was the prettiest bit o' fun ever Josiah saw. Bang went the stone against the door. Out popped Grammer a-looking up-street and down-street, muttering maledictions against "them twoads o' bwoys." This continued some time with unvarying success, until Grammer with that phenomenal nimbleness of intellect which afterwards brought her into bad repute, popped out at an unexpected moment. A brown panshard was whizzing across the road. It just grazed her forehead—"a near touch it hadn't a-cut ope the head o' her"—and when she put up her apron there was the "leastest drap o' blood." So Josiah was free from her spells for ever. The strongest witch that ever went abroad at night as a black cat, or travelled by day in the form of a hare, or crept unbeknown into a neighbour's house in the shape of a fat toad, was powerless against a body who had once "a-drawed blood." And in that lay the corroborative value of Josiah's experience. Nothing out of the common had ever happened to

Josiah. He slept quiet o’ nights, and only dreamed by day when he thought of his little family, or his large family, or his long family, just as it chanced to be called. Thirteen children with never speck nor blemish ; and still a future before Josiah. When that motherly soul, his wife, at a ripe old age was carried to her last resting-place, it was the pride of the longest funeral that ever walked down Sutton, that she had reared eighteen and never lost one.

Yet if ever human soul was a fair prey for witchcraft it was that placid blue-eyed man. He had a natural love for the occult, and drank superstition more readily than cider. He cured warts by burying rusty bacon under the stable door, turned pale if you put the bellows on the table, and once, meeting four magpies on the road to Bridgetown market, he turned back. Whether there was danger or no, Josiah could not say. “ There mid be, an’ there midn’.” Josiah “ could’n zee noo good in a-gwain on—where there wur a doubt like.” And certainly Josiah did not die—at that time.

When Mrs. Carew had watched the departure of Mr. Poltimore’s carriage, she put on her things, popped out to get hold of the rights of it and walked across to see Mrs. Culliford.

Inconvenienced by the discharge of Tamsin, that good woman even forgot the formality of

asking Mrs. Carew to take her bonnet off. She was bustling about in the dairy-house, and carried on the conversation whilst she crumbled up the curd.

“No, thank ’ee sure, Mrs. Culliford. I won’t zit down. Mr. Poltimore do claim the Zandboys’ house for his Lordship. Oh ees, he’ve a-bin there this morning, ten minutes by the clock. Looking very well in health, wi’ more colour I thought. An’ he says they mus’ pay or go, for so his Lordship have a-made up his mind.”

“Then ’tes to be hoped they’ll go, and Zutton ring the bells to see the backs o’ ’em. Meäster have a-said times out o’ number, that they ben’t wo’th their salt, the whole kit o’ ’em. Oh no, Meäster don’t want ’em to Zutton.”

“Well, an’ they be a real disgrace,” agreed Mrs. Carew. “Why the night you send out Tamsin all the street wur to an upstore. An’ ’t wur said that Mr. Burt’s maid did come down every night o’ her life an’ walk wi’ Mr. Hensley. Scand’lous! I do call it. An’ they to pretend to be so good. Though I never didn’ call his preachen gospel myself. And ’tes said they do walk arm an’ crook up ’pon hill, a’most every day o’ their lives.”

“Tidden any good for her to walk wi’ he. He’d walk wi’ a hundred an’ still be heart-whole,” cried Mrs. Culliford. “But he’ll never be a mo’sel bit o’ good in theäs wordle. That’s what Meäster do

zay. Live zo long as he mid, he'll never be way-wise. Not a penny to bless hiszelf. An' go a-card playen for the wealth o' the Indies. An' eet you can't help a-liking the man—at times."

"An', what wur it about Tamsin?"

"There, don't 'ee talk about Tamsin. She'll never come to no good, a lazy giglet. I ca'n't think what's come over the maid. But la! wi' thik Marion Burt a larnen o' her to read, she wur raised right o' her place like. Out to back door all hours. Tamsin! An' you mid holla yourself hoarse. An' she right down aneast the ricks. Tamsin! Tamsin! But lawk! her head that vul o' somethen or nother that she really 'oodn' a-heard the last trump. Ah! they be a bad lot. An' 'tes my belief that most all the mirschie' that do hap in parish thik wold Grammer do bide an' zit in her wold chair an' hatch."

So between these prejudices and the imposing personality of Mr. Poltimore, the Sandboys received no moral support in their emergency. They talked and grumbled and declared that they were being robbed of their own and never a sixpence would they pay. But the question was quickly lost sight of in weightier matters. And as Mr. Poltimore soon afterwards proceeded to carry out some repairs, it was understood in Sutton that the sixpence had been paid.

CHAPTER XVIII

PIXY-LED

SUMMER slowly passed, but Mr. Burt made no reference to the promised disclosures. In accordance with his intentions Mr. Hensley left Sutton and went to live at Bridgetown. He had made an arrangement with Mr. John Culliford to ride over to the farm daily to pursue his studies, but he never came. The winter wheat in the field on the hill-side was cut ; and on one of their customary walks Marion and her father stood by the gate, and watched Abraham walk round and put a bough on every tenth stitch to claim it for the tithe. Wagons piled up with golden sheaves creaked slowly through the village on their way to the mow-barton. And then for days the women-folk were leazing in the stubble, old Grammer bent two-double, and Tamsin, who had not yet found another place. But the girl was greatly changed. As she went home one evening, carrying a sheaf upon her head, from the garden Marion wished her a good-night. But Tamsin scarcely answered her. Early in September, a few days after Mr.

Poltimore came to shoot, it was said that she had gone to Bridgetown.

Mr. Hensley came to shoot with Mr. Poltimore. From her window Marion watched them on the hill, and afterwards they went down upon the moor. Mindful of her promise she kept within doors, and so she did not speak to him. But his presence there awakened her love and longing, and when at dusk he drove away in Mr. Poltimore's carriage, she felt as if all happiness and hope had departed. In leaving Sutton he had deserted her. He could never have loved her. It was all false, all he had ever said. Yet when these reflections forced themselves upon her mind, far from injuring her pride and stirring her resentment, they only ministered to her despair. This was a result of the isolation in which she had lived. She felt there could be nothing more in life, if she had lost his love. Then she even mistrusted her father's silence. Could he be trifling, as Lycurgus trifled with the Spartans, when he beguiled them into a promise from which they were never to be free? Or did he know, now Hensley was gone, that there was no further danger?

The little buzz of scandal which had followed John Sandboy's revelation quickly subsided and was forgotten in subjects of deeper public interest. Even Mrs. Culliford and Mrs. Carew found some-

thing more important to talk about. For week by week Tranter Coombs brought wonderful tales of the fearful state of the country. Organized gangs of armed men, he said, were going about destroying and burning everything they came "anecast." There was to be civil war, and the Duke of Wellington had ordered the British army to be in readiness. The lower orders, so the tranter affirmed, were going to rise and march from town to town, "a-zetten vire" to the stacks of everybody who used machinery or had voted against Reform.

"'Tes to be hoped they won't come to Manor Farm to Zutton," said Mrs. Culliford.

But Sutton began to feel apprehensive. And one day in October, when the tops of elm trees were turning yellow, and dead leaves began to fall fluttering on the wind, Mr. John Culliford, Abraham and Josiah, happening to meet on the causeway, decided that something ought to be done. But what? Josiah, never fertile in suggestions, didn't see that anything could be done. "Do 'ee walk in and drink a cup o' cider," said Abraham. They unanimously accepted.

Abraham's house was quiet. Free from the distraction of wife or child, it was a fitting birthplace for a great idea, and the three worthies sat round the open hearth, laboriously thinking.

"I'd fall in wi' anything myself, so right as ninepence," volunteered Josiah; "if I didn' ha' to think o' it vust."

"I do carr' the wold duck-gun up to bed every night o' my life," said Abraham, "an' have theäs years. If I were ever to hear the leastest soun' I'm blamed if I 'ouldn' vire un off out o' winder. He'd gally 'em, if there wur anybody about, I'll warr'nt un—if he didn' bu'st."

"Ay! that's all very well," argued Mr. John Culliford, "but we mid all be a-burned to a cinder avore you do wake. No, what we do want is to walk roun' of a night, an' bide about in a odd corner here an' there to hear that everything is quiet. 'T'es in the small hours o' the marnen that mirschie' do come about. An' eet in the still o' night, you can hear if 'tes only a mouse a-moven."

"So you can," said Josiah. "Ay, manies o' times I've a-heard Bridgetown clock strike when I wur up o' top o' hill wi' the ewes."

"You see 't 'ud only be twice a week to take a night apiece," reflected Abraham.

"I'd sooner goo twice so often, an' goo two together," suggested Josiah.

"No, no, Josiah. Ther's no need o' that. Why, you've a-bin out by night hundreds o' times. 'T'es only to walk drough parish an' over hill, an' stan' about a bit an' listen," said Mr. John Culliford.

“But what be ’ee to do, if you do zee anything?”

“Well, be zure, you ca’n’t do much, Josiah——”

“You must gie th’ alarm,” put in Abraham.

“What, hollar?”

“Ay. Hollar vor the life o’ ’ee,—Come on, Mr. Bartlett; come on, Mr. Culliford! Here they be. Come on, John; come on, Bill!”

“A terr’ble good plan that. They’d think the parish was ’pon their tails,” agreed Josiah. “That ’ud make ’em run, I’ll warr’nt ’em.”

So it was arranged that watch should be kept in this manner, and thus the invasion of Sutton was provided against. The remarkable experiences of these worthies on their midnight tramps are related to this day.

Abraham was the first to whom anything exceptional occurred. It was a windy night, with fine driving rain; and to prevent himself being overtaken by sleep Abraham kept up a good fire and sat in the chimney corner with his cider cup. At intervals he journeyed to the door, slightly opened it and peered out into the darkness. It was a night not fit for a dog to be about in. The cold gust sent Abraham shivering back to his fireside, and on each occasion, with forethought worthy of a parish clerk, he put the “leastest drap o’ gin” in his cider, to fortify his constitution against the cold and wet. At a little before mid-

night he put on his long drab coat and staggered into the street. But lawk! the wind was that strong, "more than anybeddy 'ud ever a-thought," that it was as much as Abraham could do to keep his feet. The night was so black as a bag. "You couldn't zee your han' avore your face"—not at first. So Abraham kept to the middle of the road, "so fur as he wur able," until he got down by the church, and then he went through the drang-way into the lane. By this time his eyes were getting used to the light; and he made good progress until he came over-right the pit and the bottom of the wood. There by the ash trees the fairies got hold of Abraham. Never was man more pixy-led. They turned him round and round, for all the world like spinning a top, until his head "wur all to a mizmaze like," and then they pushed him into ditch right down along-straight and made him so wet as a muck. When he tried to get up they dragged "brimmles athirt the face o' un," until Abraham, according to his own confession, "did blood like a pig." They hooked his drab coat, a'most a new coat that Abraham "'ud swear he hadn' a-had more 'an ten year," up in hedge, so that "the tail o' on wur a strent right down drough in dree places." Yet in spite of all this ill-usage Abraham never once lost his presence of mind, He knew if he could only change his stockings he

could beat the beggaring things. But he could never find his legs. When he put down his hand to come at his boots the pixies sort o' pushed it away into the mud. There must have been thousands of them, all so full of mischief as an egg is full of meat. But the prank which inflicted the greatest humiliation upon Abraham was the not being permitted to get at his own boot-lace.

At last there came a lull, Abraham arose and stood unmolested in the lane. He could hear them laughing and talking up in the boughs, and their conversation made a sort of humming, like a swarm of bees, but very different to the wind. Never could he call to mind a time when he had felt so angry in himself, but he deemed it prudent to get along quietly and steal away, if possible whilst they were engaged. So he crept modestly through the hollow and out upon the hill. There he stood awhile in the lew of the wall at the top of the arable ground.

Presently he became aware of a tall figure standing on the roadside a few yards away. It was quite alone, some traveller probably, also seeking the shelter of the wall. It is the civil custom of those parts never to meet a stranger at night without an exchange of salutations.

"Good-night," said Abraham.

But there was no response.

"I zaid good-night," repeated Abraham.

But the figure remained silent as the stone wall.

"What ! too proud to speak, be 'ee ? If dost'n't zay good-night I'll gie thee a clout under ear."

The figure remained irresponsive, but undaunted.

Now Abraham had been a smartish man in his time, and a tidy wrestler to boot. He was still a dangerous fellow, when his blood was up, and the pixies had ruffled his temper and made him most terrible short. So he hit out a blow heavy enough to fell an ox. It made Abraham's fist tingle, sure enough. But the stranger stood up like a man. Then Abraham felt he was in for a biggish business, and he settled down for a good fair and square fight. But he couldn't very often hit the man. The way that stranger dodged the blows in that dim light was truly marvellous. And when Abraham hit, it was of no more consequence than a fly on a grinding-stone. Then the happy idea entered his head to try the sudden effect of a fair back fall. Abraham rushed in. The man vanished.

But Abraham was embracing the milestone !

"Drat they things o' pixies !"

Determined to have no more of it, he sat down on a heap of stones, took off his boots, unbuttoned the four little flat brass buttons of his knee

breeches, and drew off his grey worsted stockings. The fairies did all they could to interfere. They turned back the toes. They held up the heels. But Abraham pulled and tugged—at last got his hose on inside out—and triumphed.

The remainder of the night passed without incident. But never had any one been so teased before, and, according to his own avowal, when Abraham came to look at himself in the morning, he was "all to lippets, an' more like a mommet 'an a man."

Josiah's adventure was less injurious, but more blood-curdling.

Pixies he understood. They were the souls of infants unbaptized, cut off in the rosy dawn ere the bright exuberance of budding life could fade in the broad daylight of experience. Their seeming malice was but wanton mirth. Besides, had Abraham not put gin in his cider, it is doubtful whether he had heard anything but the pattering raindrops upon the rustling leaves. The restless wandering of a sin-steeped soul is another matter.

It was a clear, frosty night, and every star was twinkling when Josiah started upon his round. It was one of the stillest nights that ever Josiah could call to mind, and he walked across the fields towards the Manor Farm. Downright artfulness,

supported by constitutional diffidence, induced Josiah to stand in out of the way like ; and he leaned against the great wych-elm in Mr. John Culliford's house ground, well in hearing of the mow-barton. He was wondering what two young barreners would be likely to fetch to Bridgetown winter fair, and whether—and then he heard the clattering of horses' hoofs on the high road above the hill. You could hear them a couple of miles away or more that night. Doubtless a drove of colts going to the fair. But as the sound came nearer, Josiah could distinguish the regular tick-tack of well-broken horses trotting together like clockwork. Josiah counted. Four in all, and a faint rumble of wheels. "Gentry or summat," Josiah supposed, 'a-gwain home from somewhere or nother." But when it came to the gap between the pine spinney and the clump of holm, he saw—no, in relating this story Josiah was most particular that he saw nothing, and Josiah was not the man to lie—he heard a coach-and-four leave the high road, and push through the trees for all the world like a whirlwind up in air so high as church-tower, and yet you could hear the hoofs and wheels so clear as if 't were 'pon a turnpike-road—and right over the wych-elm there sounded the crack of a whip, and one o' the ho'ses broke into a canter, but only for three strides ; and when it had

passed Josiah breathed again, and watched the sound like, right home to the yew tree by the Manor House Chapel, and there the noise broke off so short—so short as a carrot. And Sutton clock wur a-stricking twelve.

Josiah Clarke was a just man, with the fear of God in his heart, and he knew well that forty thousand Lord Harries, with forty thousand coaches and four, would be powerless to injure any mortal living man. But his knees bent under him as he hurried home to bed.

Mr. John Culliford walked abroad by night armed with the handstick of a drashle, as tough a bit of ash as ever man could wish to crack a crown with. He strolled through the village in the dark with the slow dignity which distinguished his public movements by day. He loitered in corners and listened. His hatred of illegality was so deep, that he burned with indignation against imaginary law-breakers who did not come, and felt himself a match for a dozen of the rascals. His idea of strategy was to stand at four cross roads and await the advance of the enemy.

He had been his round and reached the spot where the road passing by his house enters the highway. He laid his hand on the kissing-gate, when suddenly his attention was arrested by a noise in the field—his field. It was only momen-

tary. The death wail of an agonized animal abruptly cut short.

Mr Culliford could scarcely contain himself. He knew what it meant ; and the presumption of poachers in coming to the Manor Farm, where he, John Culliford, was born and bred, and his father before him, was almost more than he could bear. Skirting the road ran a narrow plantation of larch, and with the quickness of thought, he nipped through the gate, and ran on tiptoe alongside the hedge with a nimbleness most creditable to a man of his size and importance. Then he stopped. The men, whoever they were, were certainly coming towards him ; and he stood back against the plantation, and waited.

They came within a few yards, and held a whispered consultation. He could hear every word they said.

“Let’s put down here.”

“Well, be sprack then. An’ then goo on.”

“Catch hold, John Zandboy—ca’n’t ee? Ha ! ha ! How John Culliford ’ud hollar if he could know, I’ll warr’ant un.”

“He’s a-bed. An’ the best place vor un too,” said John Sandboy.

That this deliberation of iniquity should be interspersed with derision of himself was more than Mr. John Culliford could bear. He rushed out with

the impetuosity of a mad bull. "You pack o' gallis rogues," he shouted, and he hit John Sandboy on the head. Scared by this sudden onslaught the remainder of the party took to their heels, and disappeared in the darkness.

Mr. John Culliford fairly danced around his prostrate victim. "Zo John Culliford 'ud hollar—'ood er? You wait an' zee what Mr. Poltimore do zay. Zo John Culliford wur a-bed an' asleep—wur 'er? You wait and hear what Mr. Poltimore do do. You'd put down here—'ood ee? Wait till Mr. Poltimore do put you down to Ilchester jail."

At morn the poachers' net and a heap of rabbits were found in the field. And then the shadow of Mr. Poltimore's displeasure hung over the Sandboy cottage like a thunder-cloud.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FIRE OF BRISTOL

IT was on the last Sunday in October that Mr. Hensley next came to Sutton. He rode into the village in the afternoon, just as people were coming out of church, and overtook Mr. Culliford by the corner. As she walked up the street, Marion glanced back and saw them earnestly talking together. Mr. Culliford was standing on the causeway, very erect, very red, very angry. Mrs. Culliford, glorious in her Sunday black silk, was wringing her hands. Then they called back the people who had passed, and others stopped also ; so that quite a crowd of eager listeners gathered around. Mr. Percival, coming from the church last and alone, stood a moment by the gate, and then hurried to inquire the cause of this excitement.

“I think there must be something the matter, Father.”

Mr. Burt turned to look. Inquisitiveness exercised little influence over his mind, and dislike of Mr. Hensley prevented him from making inquiry.

" I daresay it is not of great consequence," he said
And so they walked quietly home.

Late that evening Mr. Percival called. His visits had lately been less frequent, and no more had been said about the school. But this was a relief, for Marion's heart was full of bitterness against him.

He came to tell them the news, he said. It had been brought by coach to Bridgetown, and was doubtless correct, that yesterday in Bristol, at the opening of the City Sessions, the mob had risen and stoned the Recorder on his way to the Guild-hall. In the evening they had attacked the Mansion House, broken the windows, burst in the doors. Then they set fire to the building, but happily the soldiers arrived in time to prevent the conflagration. So dangerous was the mob, that the troops had remained all night in the streets, and the inhabitants were in the greatest consternation.

The knowledge that Mr. Hensley must have brought these tidings made conversation difficult. Mr. Burt repressed those questions of detail which rise so readily to the lips in moments of excitement ; and Mr. Percival was studiously silent concerning the source of his information. Ill at ease and oppressed, Marion rose and left the room.

This glimpse of her lover had revived the inten-

sity of her love. The presence of Mr. Hensley aroused her spirit of opposition and revolt. True, she had promised ; but was she to be left like a child without one word ? She must speak to her father. She must meet her lover, and put an end to this suspense. Perhaps he came to Sutton that day on purpose to see her. She listened for the sound of his return. If he were at the Manor Farm, he would not be late on this Sunday night. The thought flashed across her mind that he might wait to come below her window when every one was asleep, and she felt afraid. But oh ! if he would only come, to prove that he had not forgotten her.

When Mr. Percival left, she rejoined her father in the study. The evenings were already cold, but with his usual absence of mind, he had neglected the fire, and only a few dull embers rested between the bars. As she knelt to restore it, he interrupted her. " It is scarcely worth while, Marion. It will be getting late." He spoke nervously, as if the movement and the noise disturbed his thoughts, and at once she felt a presentiment that he intended to speak to her that night. She watched the wavering of his procrastination, and waited. Fearless in his opposition to injustice or untruth, he had not courage to speak of a matter so closely touching his own heart. She wanted to remind him of his promise. But pity held her silent. And then

from the shelf he took an old calf-bound volume, and following his practice of a Sunday night, began to read aloud. It was the *Imitatio Christi* of Thomas à Kempis, and he read on and on, forgetting all worldly matters in the beauty of these spiritual admonitions. Sometimes a phrase seemed to strike him with peculiar force, and he stopped to repeat it, as if in verification of its truth from his own experience.

"Many words do not satisfy the soul ; but a good life comforteth the mind, and a pure conscience giveth great confidence in God."

"The more a man is at one within himself, and of single heart, so much more and higher things doth he understand without labour ; for he receiveth the light of wisdom from above."

The girl listened intently. The impressive earnestness of his manner might have made the reading of that night for ever memorable ; but for another reason she remembered it in after years. When he had finished and shut the book, the mild austerity of the old monk had exalted his spirit above the things of earth. She could not speak to him, and so they parted for the night.

But she could not sleep. The wind rustled through the laurels, and in her expectation she took it for a footstep on the path. A long twig of clematis, torn from the wall, kept tapping

against the window-pane, and at times it sounded so human that she raised her head and listened. Yet she felt sure *he* must have ridden home to Bridgetown long ago. Her senses were so alert that the ticking of the clock upon the staircase became quite painful, although she had never before noticed it. The clock gurgled in its throat, and struck twelve — one — two. She counted every hour ; and sometimes the warped elm boards, with which the house was floored, creaked without reason, as if trodden upon by feet which made no sound. Her heart ached. If she could only sleep and forget her love and all its troubles !

Suddenly there came a knock—hurried, but long and unmistakable—upon the front door. The thing was so unheard of, so incomprehensible in that quiet village, that it filled her with alarm. Before she could collect her thoughts, it was repeated louder still ; and then she heard a window open, and the murmur of distant voices in eager conversation.

She sprang up and began to dress. Presently her father came to her door.

“Do not be frightened, Marion,” he whispered, in a voice broken with agitation ; “I am going out. Abraham Bartlett has been to say there is a great fire. They think that Bristol is burning. I will not be long.”

"I shall be ready in one moment."

"No ; do not come."

"Yes, I must come. I could not stay here alone."

In reality her care for him was greater than her fear. In a moment she was in readiness, and throwing a cloak around her, she followed him downstairs. He had struck a light, and they left a lamp burning in the library. The night was cold and dark, and as they hastened down the street, she took his arm and led him in the uncertain gloom. In front they could hear the villagers Abraham above the rest, explaining what he had seen, and how he had been to every house in the village. Guided by the voices, they took the road through the Manor fields, past Mr. Culliford's house, to the open plain on the hill-top. The night was overcast, and only here and there a solitary star shone through a gap in the darkness. But to the north the sky was in a ruddy glow, extending far along the horizon ; and masses of cloud stood out in bold relief tinged with a lurid red.

"The whole city must be in flames," cried Mr. Burt, in an agony of distress. The girl stood transfixed with awe. Where the senses can seize no detail, nor fetter the imagination with a fact—there is the sublimity of terror.

They were the last to reach the hill-top. Everybody was there, and in the gloom no one heeded their approach. Marion, trembling with excitement, had scarcely heard her father's words, and did not reply to them. The villagers also, looking like blots against the glowing sky, were awe-stricken and silent. Then from their midst she recognised the voice of Mr. Hensley.

"It must be Bristol. On any clear night you may see the reflection of the lights upon the sky."

"Ay. 'Tis Bristol, sure enough," agreed Mr. Culliford.

"Now whatever can anybeddey think o' sich wickedness? Why, they must be a-burnen thousands," reflected Josiah.

"Thoughtless ignorance! There'll be a pretty penny o' rates to pay," said Abraham.

"I pray God there be no loss of life."

As Mr. Burt ejaculated this fervent wish the villagers, instinctively touched by a deeper humanity, gathered around him.

"What, Mr. Burt? A sad sight this, Zir! An' how's Mr. Burt?" said Mr. John Culliford, advancing to shake hands. In the movement Marion was momentarily parted from her father. It was then that Mr. Hensley came forward to speak to her.

"Marion," he whispered, "come and talk to me. Don't go away. I am only here for one night.

They say there are snipe upon the moor, and I wanted to get out in the early morning. Meet me to-morrow, dearest, before I go back.”

It startled her sensibilities in the midst of this excitement to find him thus unmoved. “ I cannot,” she said. And yet his words made her very glad.

“ You cannot refuse. I am going to leave Bridgetown at once. I want to tell you about it. I think of going abroad again.”

“ Why are you going to leave ? ”

“ I cannot stand this country. Nobody can ever settle in England who has been anywhere else. Come a little further into the field and talk to me. They are all staring at the fire. Nobody will notice us in the dark.”

Ever the same irresponsible love of change. It accounted both for his discontent and the contemptuous tone of his reference to his neighbours.

“ No, no,” she replied quickly.

He had already taken her arm. “ You must,” he pleaded.

“ I have promised not to.”

“ That is all the fault of that poaching thief,” he said angrily. “ But you must come and tell me of it. That is only fair. What did your father say? Was he very angry ? ”

“ I said I would not see you again—at present.”

"You can scarcely be considered to break that promise on a night like this," he laughed. Neither his agitation, nor the trouble she had suffered, nor the belief that Bristol was in flames, was sufficient to depress his buoyancy.

But her life-long habit of obedience would neither yield to entreaty nor satisfy its compunction with a mere quibble. She still tried to withdraw from his touch.

"You have changed since the other night," he said reproachfully.

"No, no. But father would never consent—and I promised——"

"All is fair in love. Come further back. You love me?"

"Yes. I love you ; I love you !"

"Then what is there to fear? Who has any right to interfere with you? I *must* go away. I intend to go in a fortnight. I will take two berths, and fetch you as I said. Then we will never part. That is the only way. Say you will do that, Marion. The time is very short, and I should never see you again."

The girl was weeping bitterly. She dare not promise, and her heart could not refuse.

"Come to-morrow by the copse, when you can. I will wait there all the morning. It may be the last opportunity."

She felt her resolution fail. And yet, if she yielded this how could she then withstand entreaty?

"Marion!" called her father.

"Miss Burt, is that you? Why, wherever is Miss Burt?" There was quite a little stir amongst the villagers.

"Quick, say you will come." He was still holding her.

"I will come."

"Good-bye, my darling."

He pressed her hand to his lips and vanished into the gloom as she rejoined her father. She did not see him again.

Her conscience smote her, and yet she had been innocent of any intention to break her word. The thing had fallen out contrary to her expectation and will. But it was in accord with her inclination, and she suffered a sense of guilt. As she regained her father's side the night wind, laden with the breath of the moor, swept over the hill, and she shivered.

"You are cold," he said kindly, "and so am I. Do you remember the distinction drawn by the old sage, between things within our power and things beyond control? We can do no good. Let us go home."

On their way he talked without ceasing of the

critical condition of the country, the irresponsible madness of human passion when aroused to violence, and the danger that the spirit of destruction, once let loose, might become rife in every town and hamlet throughout the land. The girl walked quietly by his side, scarcely following this monologue, in which was neither question nor pause. Did he know that she had talked with Hensley? Rapidly in her mind was forming the intention to tell her father everything. She must go to the copse to-morrow, but she would say that she was going. She was so overcome with agitation that not to speak now was a relief.

When they reached home, laying his hand on her arm, he led her into the study. The little maidservant had slept through the knocking, and the house was quiet as the night ; but he carefully closed the door, as if still jealous to guard the secret of his life.

“Mr. Hensley is back at the farm.”

“I could not help it, Father. He spoke——”

“I did not think otherwise,” he interrupted quickly, waving his hand. “I could never mistrust you, Marion. But I want you to tell me what he has said to you. Has he asked you to marry him?”

The question seemed to imply a doubt. Here

again was the old prejudice so ready to condemn him unheard.

"He is going abroad," she said coldly. "He has asked me to go with him."

"Where? To what?" he asked in eager anxiety.

"I did not inquire. You know I would not leave you."

He gave a sigh of relief.

"But if I were no longer here?"

She hesitated. A question so direct, so real, so free from sentimental weakness, yet full of fear, defied evasion. Could she promise to respect his wishes in such a matter when he might no longer claim her care? That night obedience had been well-nigh impossible; and were she alone, what could there be but love?

"I should marry him," she plainly said.

"I doubt it not. I know the romance, and I know the reality." There was a momentary bitterness in his tone, and he walked across the room in deep emotion. "What is there in common between you? What chance of companionship when the first flush of love is past? There is no constancy in such a nature. With you it would be deep, deep; and with him the fancy of the moment. Unstable—unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

He paused. Carried away by excitement, his words had outstripped his intention.

"I know full well," he went on, "the misery of ill-assorted marriage. Years have passed. I make no accusation, no complaint. Our love was a dream—a phantasm with no relation to the facts of life. Yet your mother loved me wildly, and married me in spite of friends. I had already left the Established Church, and that was an objection. She was rich, and I at that time had almost nothing. And I was many years older than she. I was a successful preacher—that is, the people flocked to hear me. And I was full of zeal, God forgive me! or ambition. I was strong enough to be austere. There was nothing beyond my power of self-denial but gentleness with frailty. And she had always been surrounded with wealth and frivolity. She could not breathe the severer air in which I lived. To her, learning was a cloud destroying the sunlight, and life became like a long winter day. There were no children either for several years, until you came. And we drifted apart. Sometimes for days we scarcely spoke, and she amused herself with friends of her girlhood with whom I had no sympathy—whom I hated. I almost ceased to consider her, until by a folly my position, my influence as a preacher, was impaired, and that hurt my pride. I reproved her,

and we quarrelled. Through this retrospect of years the violence of my anger seems inconceivable. That evening she left me."

"Left you?"

The girl could not understand.

"She went abroad with her lover. She died of fever in another land, and I never saw her again."

With a cry of horror Marion threw her arms around her father's neck and hid her face upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER XX

BRIDGETOWN RIOTS

THE grey of early morning was in the air when Marion parted from her father and went upstairs. She mechanically drew the blind aside and looked out upon the cold moor. The trunks of pollard willows loomed through the mist, and Hensley was already walking beside one of the rhines. He had stayed up the whole night, and come down from the hill at sunrise. But she had not thought of him, and scarcely saw him when she glanced from the window.

Her father's story had fallen upon her like a thunderbolt, crashing through the structure raised by her fond imagination to enshrine those relics of her dead mother. That such things had happened history related. Ancient drama, too, and epic poetry dealt with such subjects when the earth was young; but even then these sorrows were half-mythical. However living in the presentation, they could not stand before the mind as facts. They had no counterpart in this modern life of civilization and revealed religion. Had such a tale been told

of some mere acquaintance, she would have refused to hear—not because it was painful, but incredible.

In the corner between the fireplace and the dressing-table was an old high-backed chair covered with chintz. She sat down and cried—cried over an irreparable loss. The blow was as real as if her mother had been living yesterday, and now lay dead. It shattered her ideals, and bruised the beauty of innocent love. And then the pity of it! Those years of broken-hearted loneliness suffered by her father! His self-accusation added a last pathos to the tragedy. He could never have been other than gentle, as he had always been to her. Something was broken—something gone.

As morning grew, and objects in the room became more distinct, the place itself seemed changed. The pale sunless light glistened upon the miniature still hanging against the wall and the china dog upon the mantelpiece, but her joy had fled. Life had been so beautiful in its rich simplicity, and now the charm was gone. The early twittering of the birds outside her window distracted her, and she wished that they would cease, she, who had always listened so intently to every living thing. One touch of stern reality and the bubble of her romance was gone. At last, weary with wakefulness, and overcome by fatigue, she fell asleep

The sun was high and it was broad daylight when she awoke. Some one was knocking at the door, and she sprang up in alarm, for it fitted to a waking dream that Abraham was calling them again. She heard her father's step in the passage and listened. A woman's voice, raised in interminable indignation and lament, fell upon her ears; and she distinguished the sing-song tones of Mrs. Sandboy, familiar enough in time gone by, when Tamsin lived with them. She looked at her watch; it was almost noon. Regretful that her father had been left alone, she performed a hasty toilet and went downstairs.

Mrs. Sandboy was standing in the porch. Her red hair as usual was loose upon her forehead, and tears had stained her freckled cheeks. The tale of her woes, broken by sobs, was drawing to a close; but at the sight of Marion she began afresh.

"An' whatever we shall do I ca'n't never think. For they do all say, he'll goo to jail so sure as the light, an' he ca'n't get nobody to swear he werden there, for there he wur act'ly a-catched. An' they do all say, that now we've a-paid the zixpence Mr. Poltimore can turn us all out so safe as a gun. For none o' 'em ca'n't abide John. An' the wold Grammer they ca'n't a-bear. They'd be glad enough to see the backs o' us, I do believe. An however we be to get bread, I ca'n't think——

"But he never wouldn' a-went if 't hadn' a-bin for some o' Upton lazy drunken fellers, that coy-ducked 'un away. Nor he never wouldn' a-went if he'd oonce a-zet voot in house that night, vor I shouldn' never a-let un gone. An' I thought, Miss Marion, that if Mr. Burt did jus' speak a word to Mr. Poltimore, perhaps——"

It was a forlorn hope, too vague to be expressed; but Mr. Burt could never refuse a kindness.

"I will go over to Bridgetown and see what can be done. But I scarcely know Mr. Poltimore."

The poor woman brightened up at once, and wiped her tears with the corner of her apron.

"And how does Tamsin like her new place?" asked Marion.

Mrs. Sandboy hesitated a moment. "She've a-left. Leastways so tranter did say. There, what wi' one an' tother I'd so soon be in my grave," she replied. And without another word she turned quickly away and walked down the path.

It was not until the end of the week that Mr. Burt found an opportunity to go into Bridgetown. Every day it rained, and he thought it better to walk than to tell Mr. John Culliford his errand. A newspaper, lent him by Mr. Percival, contained a full account of the destructive riots in Bristol, the burning of the public buildings, the firing on the

mob, and loss of life. Rumours were also rife in Sutton of disturbances in other towns ; but these, being merely hearsay, did not reach the inmates of the house on the moor.

On the Friday after breakfast, he glanced at the sky and determined to start.

"I will walk part of the way with you," said Marion, and she brought his umbrella and helped him on with his coat.

The lower part of the moor was under water, and the road was everywhere covered with pools of mud. She felt uneasy at the discomfort of his journey.

"I wish you could have been driven as before," she said.

"I am almost glad to walk."

A little later, with a great clanging of accoutrements, there came behind them from the village at full trot the Sutton detachment of Yeomanry Cavalry, in full regimentals now, Mr. John Culliford in front, then Abraham, and Josiah with his hand on his helmet.

"They must be going somewhere to exercise," said Mr. Burt, as he stepped back from the splashing hoofs. "So I could not have been driven had I wished."

"You will not stay long?" urged Marion, when it was time for her to return.

"Oh dear no, my dear," he replied. "I shall make haste. The afternoons get dark so early now."

"I shall watch, and start to meet you when you come in sight upon the moor," she said cheerfully as they parted, and she several times looked back at his retreating figure. Nothing in the future should cast a shadow upon their love.

He trudged steadily on. He had little confidence in the result of his intended visit to Mr. Poltimore, but he carefully marshalled his arguments. He would not defend lawlessness, nor offend the susceptibilities of Mr. Poltimore by an uncalled-for criticism of the game laws. He would appeal to that outraged dignitary on the ground of charity and loving-kindness, and the misfortune which must befall a household by the temporary withdrawal of the bread-winner. By the time he reached the outskirts of the little town he had composed quite a speech, and he stopped at the turnpike, and inquired the way to Mr. Poltimore's house. He thought the woman who answered looked scared and regarded him strangely.

The entrance to the town also looked strange. It was a wide street, with houses of some pretension standing in gardens, or behind iron railings; but it seemed completely forsaken. He stood in the

middle of the road and looked around. Windows provided with shutters were without exception shut, and Mr. Burt's first impression was that some distinguished townsman must have died, and that Bridgetown was paying respect to the day of his funeral. But just then on the breeze came a sound of shouting. The centre of the town, the shops, the fountain, the market-place, and the town-hall were at some little distance. Mr. Burt felt perplexed, and doubtful that he might not find Mr. Poltimore at home, but he continued on his way.

Then he passed occasional shops, but all were closed. Groups of people excitedly talking were standing at corners and in the streets. He stood in indecision, doubtful whom he should address; and still the shouting increased to a roar, and suddenly behind him from a bye-way there came a rush of men and boys yelling and waving sticks. They stopped before a house with a paved court in front, smashed the windows, burst open the door and rushed in.

Greatly disturbed by the presence of this spirit of lawlessness, Mr. Burt hurried away, and entered the market square, at one end of which stood the town hall. The Yeomanry Cavalry were drawn up before the building. The place was thronged with people, many of them denouncing the authorities. "Where are the magistrates?" "Why do

not the cavalry clear the streets ? ” “ Why is not the Riot Act read ? ”

Then a general cry, “ The Riot Act ! ” “ The Riot Act ! ”

It seemed to be the universal belief that this celebrated statute was a cure for all. Yet many present, and perhaps some who cried the loudest, were on the side of disorder ; for stones were flying in all directions. And the crowd pressed from behind, until it became so packed that Mr. Burt could scarcely move, and withdrawal was rendered impossible.

At last upon the steps of the hall appeared Mr. Poltimore himself in gown and chain, and supported by the Alderman and Municipal Council of Bridgetown. In his hand was a large calf-bound volume of statutes, for in this matter verbal accuracy was held to be of the highest importance. Then in a loud voice he made proclamation in these words:—

“ Our Sovereign Lord the King chargeth and commandeth all Persons, being assembled, immediately to disperse themselves and peaceably to depart to their Habitations, or to their lawful business, upon the pains contained in the Act made in the first year of King George, for preventing tumults and riotous Assemblies.”

“ We had better clear out,” cried a bystander, a

nervous man with a grey beard. "The Yeomanry can charge now. They can knock anybody down now in the King's name."

"Not for an hour," retorted a dogged citizen of Bridgetown, with a square, contradictory face.

"I tell you they can shoot and knock down every man here. They can do what they like in the King's name. 'Tis your own fault if you stay."

"And I say by law you've got one hour, and they don't dare to——"

A universal cry, "They are coming! The Yeomanry are coming!" cut short the altercation. The man of legal mind pushed the hardest to squeeze out of the way. But now on all sides there were shouts. "The mob is in the Mayor's house." "They are sacking Mr. Poltimore's house." "They are going to set fire to Mr. Poltimore's house."

The Yeomanry advanced slowly through the square, pushing back the crowd on either side. Some people cheered. But missiles began to fall like hail, and it was seen that in some places men had found access to the housetops and were throwing tiles and coping-stones down into the street. For their own safety, law-abiding persons who had come only as spectators began to escape by every possible outlet. The place was left to the rabble and the troops. But there was now room to move, and Mr. Burt, finding a narrow alley

between some houses, hurried back into the street by which he had entered the market-place. His only desire was to get away from this terrible violence and lawlessness, so uncongenial to his gentle spirit, and return to Sutton. But that was not so easy.

In front of Mr. Poltimore's house was a scene of wild confusion ; for the rioters, unchecked and given over to the demon of destruction, had broken up and were throwing the furniture into the road. The pavement was strewn with broken bottles, and wine was dripping into the gutters as red as blood. Many of the mob were already drunk, and with a grim hilarity, pelted each other with books from Mr. Poltimore's library. A calf-bound volume fell at Mr. Burt's feet. This wanton waste was to him so pitiable, that he picked it up and stood there with it in his hand. But the grim humours of brutality appalled him more than the stone-throwing in the square, and he shrank from pushing his way through the rabble.

A strangely pathetic figure—grey-haired and irresolute, standing with a book in one hand and his umbrella in the other !

Some one spoke to him.

" You had better go away, Mr. Burt. You will get hurt, Sir."

He did not know the man, but he thanked him,

and helplessly turned back towards the market-place.

There rose a cry, "The Yeomanry! The Yeomanry!"

At that moment some score of troopers came round the corner and galloped towards them. The stranger quickly taking his arm dragged him into a doorway opening upon the pavement, and many of the rioters, alarmed at the approach of horses, ran within the railings of Mr. Poltimore's house or sought some other refuge. The few who, excited with stolen wine, dared to remain, discharged a volley of stones and fled. Hotly pursued, they took advantage of every nook and corner afforded by the ancient architecture of Bridgetown to effect escape by running back when the horsemen had ridden past.

The doorway in which Mr. Burt stood became the haven of a little body of refugees. The street itself was now cleared. For a few minutes they remained unobserved; but, now and again, one of them would rush out, hurl a stone at the back of a passing yeoman, and return. The necessity to expostulate with iniquity overcame his constitutional fear. He began to speak, and at the sound of his own words his heart gained courage.

"Have you no consideration?" he cried, "or is all reflection swallowed up by the spirit of

devastation and wrath? which can avail you nothing to advance your ends. Even should you triumph for an hour, for what benefit can you hope? Can the destruction of riches relieve the ills of poverty; or the performance of evil call down upon you the reward of good? Or if anger has driven judgment from your hearts, have you no thought that strength will prevail, and the lives of all who may be taken this day must fall forfeit to the law?"

No one paid sufficient heed even to deride, until a passing trooper, attracted by the voice, suddenly turned and rode down upon the little group. The horse came clattering upon the pavement into the doorway; the rioters dispersed and fled. Yielding to the instinct of self-preservation, Mr. Burt raised his umbrella and struck. Then, as the trooper leapt to the ground, and seized him by the collar, he looked into his eyes, and recognised Mr. Hensley!

He fell back and slipped down upon the doorstep.

The rioters were by this time dispersed, and the Yeomanry chiefly engaged in the apprehension of prisoners. Mr. Hensley bent down and raised the prostrate figure, loosened the white neck-cloth, and placed the flask to his lips, just as he had done on that first night upon the hill. He called to

Mr. John Culliford, galloping past ; and Abraham and Josiah also came.

They knocked at the door, and carried him out of the hubbub into the house. But no hubbub could disturb, no earthly habitation shelter that peaceful spirit. For James Burt never spoke again.

Such was the story of the Bridgetown riots, in which, as if in irony of human passion, only this one gentle life was sacrificed. For even the prisoners taken were afterwards set free, on the ground that when Mr. Poltimore read his Proclamation he omitted to say "God save the King" at the end.

CHAPTER XXI

NO ONE LEFT

"So much the more and higher things doth he understand without labour." The words of her father's reading on that last Sunday night came back to her again and again, haunting her brain in incomplete phrases meaningless and vain.

"We can understand nothing," she cried in hardness of heart.

She was standing by the old familiar spot where her father fainted, where they so often paused to look at the wind-driven clouds, the fleeting sunlight on the broad plain, the streak of silver sea beyond the distant hills. In the copse close by her lover had first spoken of love. She lingered with these associations, and felt the bitterness of life. Her heart was broken. The earth was still beautiful, but only as a dead fact gathered by experience and stored in the memory ; for the delight was gone.

Her father had been buried many weeks. The circumstances of his death were known to her in every detail. Mrs. Culliford and Mrs. Carew

agreed it was nothing but right she should know, and recognising her solitary condition, called to administer consolation and advice. They showed a truly deep anxiety in her future, in the sufficiency of her means, in the existence of any distant relative to whom she might go—for really to be keeping up a house for one, unless of course where there is a plenty, is such a great expense. They spoke frankly of the gossip which had gone all over the parish, and condemned a tendency in human nature to tattle about the affairs of others. But of course now she could think no more of Mr. Hensley. A pleasant man, no doubt, and good company. But la! What good is that if every penny do burn a hole in the pocket? A man of no principle, Mrs. Carew was very much afraid. In Bridgetown there was a sound that to prevent being taken for debt he had gone abroad. And the best thing he could do, for really——

There was not a soul to sympathise. Mr. Percival had undertaken the management of her affairs but Marion could not talk to him. By the graveside, mutual grief at the loss of their gentle neighbour brought about a reconciliation between the clergyman and Mr. John Culliford, and there was to be no further use for the barn. Mr. Percival intended to alter it to a school-house; but Marion had declined to help him in his scheme.

It seemed that every interest in existence was taken away. Love was lost, affection dead, and a blight had stripped memory of its blossoms. What could there be to follow but a summer without beauty, and an autumn without fruit? A flight of plovers, pitched in the arable field on the hill-side, disturbed by something passing up the lane, rose high in the air, and passed over the road with an occasional cry which sounded like a lament.

In the hollow a carter cracked his whip and spoke to his horses; and with a creaking and rumbling of wheels a wagon presently mounted the knap and turned into the high road. It was laden with household goods, but still there was room for Grammer and the smallest of the Sandboy children. On the level road it stopped whilst Mrs. Sandboy climbed up to sit upon the fore-board piece. Marion glanced at the great red letters on the yellow ground, but the name of the owner and his parish were both unknown to her.

Absorbed in her own troubles, she had forgotten the fortunes of the Sandboy family. Whether John Sandboy had been taken or even pursued, she did not know; but the rickety pile of furniture told its own tale. She stepped further into the road and waited to stop the wagon.

"Are you going to leave Sutton, Mrs. Sandboy?"

“Ees, zure. We’ve a-got to goo. Mr. Poltimore have a-tookt the house away. He ’oon’t ha’ no poachen on his Lordship’s estate, zo he zaid. An’ they had a warr’nt out against John, but there, he kep’ out o’ the way ; an’ zo Mr. Poltimore he zaid we could clear out to once, an’ hear no more o’ it, if we wur a-minded. An’ zo we’ve a-had to gie up the house that the wold man builded his-zelf. But John have a-vound work up the country where labouren volk be sca’ce. Though I never don’t believe ’tes law for all that. N’cet that ever ’twur his Lordship’s groun’—a little corner that nobody never tookt no ’count o’ till the wold man builded the house. But we be boun’ to goo. Needs mus’ when the devil do pull. Not but what there’ll be a end to it oone o’ theäs days. There’ll be a revolution zo zure as the sun. An’ I be glad o’ my heart o’ it. I wish they’d a-burned down wold Poltimore’s house—an’ I wish they’d a-burned he. Good-bye, Miss Marion. I do wish ’ee luck. Goo on, carter. Oh, ees ! there’ll be a revolution. Poor volk ’oon’t be put upon for ever by the rich. Or if they be in this life there’s some ’all vin’ out their mistake when they do goo here-vrom. Drave on, carter. Let’s git out o’ it. Good-bye, Miss Marion. Ees, they’ll vin’ their mistake when they be down in——”

Thus the sound of her shrill voice, continuing to

interject fierce discontent, died away in the distant rumble of the wheels.

Marion watched the wagon out of sight. Formerly the pathos of this exodus would have moved her to pity, perhaps to tears, but now only indignation surged within her soul. They were all gone, Faith and Hope and Charity—those never-failing companions of her happy girlhood. They had fled affrighted from the realities of life, leaving her heart untenanted and dumb. For once it would have been quite easy to say, "You must trust in Providence"; or to smile "But perhaps you will like your new home better than Sutton, Mrs. Sandboy"; or to see the want and feel the happiness of giving alms. But now she stood until the wagon had passed out of hearing, and it was too late to call. Then she blamed herself for having made no response to Mrs. Sandboy's good wishes—for having forgotten to offer her a parting gift—for having failed to inquire for Tamsin.

That was the one throb of vitality in her numbed existence, a thought of Tamsin—a feeling, instinctive but inconstant, that could she only bring that freckled child of simplicity back into the house she might again live in the warmth of a human presence. Tamsin at least was young and full of hope, and loved her. But now the possibility was gone. The Sandboys would never again be heard of in Sutton.

Suddenly a February rain came pattering against the parched leaves still clinging to the beech trees in the cover. Let it come! Hailstones struck against the wall, and covered the patches of grass between the heather and the gorse, making them white and cold as a winding-sheet. She did not hurry home, but crept into the hollow, where the wind and storm moaned against the swaying pines and beat between the naked branches overhead. The spirit of the winter blast was in sympathy with her thoughts. It had no heart and no tenderness, but sported with the poverty-stricken earth as Sin and Death and Fate sport with human existence. She stood under the shelter of the bank and waited. She had nothing to do with her time.

At last the tempest blew over, and she walked down the lane into the village. Tranter Coombs' van was drawn up before the White Hart inn, whilst he harangued a full muster of village worthies. She could see them within through the inn-window as she hurried by anxious to escape observation. Standing on the causeway was Mrs. Clarke.

"Zo the Zandboys be all a-gone, Miss Burt. Wull! they've a-got only themselves to thank. Nobody ca'n't pity 'em. Still I be sorry o' my life about Tamsin. An' you thought zo much o' her too—didn' 'ee?"

"What do you mean about Tamsin?"

"They were just a-laughen by-now to hear tranter a-tellen o' it. Oh, she've a-gone wrong, zo they do zay. She had a fancy for thik young Hensley up to Farm, simzo. But what can 'ee expect wi' zuch volk as——" /

"It is a lie," cried the girl bitterly. "A wicked lie! But what can you expect from the fools that laugh?"

She stood tall and erect in her black mourning, and glared resentment—fierce in her last defence of Love—her last clutching at the skirt of Tamsin. Then without another word she strode home to the solitary square house, leaving Mrs. Clarke lost in amazement.

From that day the villagers began to look at her askance.

As Mrs. Culliford said to Mrs. Carew when they talked over the story, "Zure, I do verily believe the poor maid mus' be off her head. She didn' ought to be let live alone like that."

"No more she didn'," agreed Mrs. Carew. "An eet I spwose if any sober body wur to offer to bide wi' her, she'd only up to once an' jump down the droat o' em for their trouble.

CHAPTER XXII

TAM SIN'S RETURN

So the time passed. Spring covered the earth with life and freshness, and on the south-west wind from beyond the willow trees came the scent of a field of beans. Everything in Sutton was renewed except the wayside cottage falling into waste. And there Nature herself ran wild ; for the lilac-bush was spreading over the path, although the garden hatch was gone and the village boys had broken all the windows.

It was on a Wednesday about midday when Tamsin came across the moor. No one noticed her, or if so it was without recognition, for she was changed, and the shawl upon her shoulders hid the burden that she carried.

The village street was always empty at that hour, and she came and stood in the roadway in front of her deserted home. To come had cost her many a pang, and many a dreary mile had she tramped ; now she stared vacantly at the desolation, for the calamity was incomprehensible and left her no resource. She sat down on the bank be-

neath the opposite hedgerow where the ditch was dry, and cried.

Josiah's children, happy in a half-holiday, came trooping from Upton by the footpath across the fields. Full of the business of childhood, the little maids held cowslips in their hands, and the boy with a strent in his jacket carried a kestrel's egg in his cap. Full a minute they stared at Tamsin with a wonder innocent and open-mouthed, and then went running down the street. The parish, soon apprised that excitement was afoot, came out of doors ; but who should be the first to speak to Tamsin ?

"Zomebody ought to tell the 'ooman what she really is," shrieked the shrill morality of Mrs. Carew. As if poor Tamsin would be the last to know !

"An' jus' ask she who've a-got to pay the rates, I wonder," added Abraham.

But nobody spoke to her. In twos and threes the villagers walked by to look, noting each detail, but never fathoming the depth of her need ; and as the wind whitened the hedgerow with the dust stirred by their passing footsteps, Tamsin drew the shawl closer upon the desert of her breast and wept. The motherly heart of Mrs. Clarke softened at the sight. She brought bread in her white apron and a drink of milk in Josiah's little brown cup.

Yet even she became profuse of explanation that what she really thought of was the child.

Mrs. Carew had cooked that morning, and that laid her under a clearly recognised responsibility, a tyranny more absolute than famine. Josiah was hungry, and that put Mrs. Clarke in haste. And so, as it was past noon, the street quickly became empty. Then Tamsin unobserved crossed to the cottage, lingered by the posts on which the bee-butts used to stand, and peered through the broken window at the desolate hearth. When the village had finished its midday meal she was nowhere to be seen.

"La! Miss Marion," cried a breathless little servant-maid, returning from some errand that afternoon. "Tamsin Zan'boy have a-bin drough Zutton a little bit by now—wi' her shoes in holes—an' a baby vive month old—an'——"

"Where is she?"

"Gone, Miss Marion."

"Gone?"

"Nobody can't tell where, Miss Marion, unless she've a-tramped on home to her volk. An' they do zay down in parish that Mr. Hensley, he what used to bide up to farm, is the——"

The child stopped abruptly, suddenly self-convicted of the offence of talking scandal. They

were planting the border by the laurel hedge that day ; for Marion still tended the garden, although more from the force of habit than a thought of the flowers. The trowel fell from her hand, but with an effort she controlled herself. " You can finish this," she said, and went into the house.

The full import of that unfinished sentence had flashed across her mind. She entered the study, where her father's books and papers remained untouched upon the table, and the sight of them seemed to bring back his gentle presence. The old calf-bound volume with its pious wisdom lay open upon the chair. Had he been right? He who never uttered ill of any man but this. The last illusion of her love was fading. In her brooding hopelessness she had kept alive her sorrow with dreams of what might have been. Now she knew that nothing might have been—except misery. The man could not love as she had known and pictured love.

And yet the vulgar tattle of the village might be false. Had she only seen Tamsin she might have searched the past with a glance and learnt all without words, she thought.

She must see Tamsin. To return to her folk the girl must pass over the hill and could not yet have gone far. By crossing the fields it might still be possible to intercept her. But there was no time

to lose. Quickly Marion went out, passed the willow trees, and took the footpath by the rookery, just as twelve months ago when she went to meet her lover.

Everything was changed. The road was solitary, but the clink of labourers' tools came from the gravel-pit in which they once sat. She walked toward the wood. The heap of stones above the knap was gone; and undergrowth had filled the gap by which she once walked down to the pit.

She stood by the wall, and looked at the blue hills.

And lo! the past came creeping home into her heart; but now her father, not her lover, was by her side. And the beauty had come back. The trees rustled, the meadows billowed to the wind, and down in the village on one of the elms before her house a thrush was singing as it sang the day she found her mother's portrait. Perhaps it was the same bird. Who could tell? And yet she thought it had a fuller note. And the history of the last two years came back with deeper understanding, and the pity of it filled her heart. And she leaned upon the lichen-covered wall, and hid her face, and cried—for her mother's sin—her father's sadness—for the solitude of life—for Tamsin.

But Tamsin did not come.

It was evening when Marion passed through the hollow to go home, and as she caught sight of the tithe-barn with its new thatched roof gleaming yellow between the trees the longing for occupation returned. She would write to Mr. Percival and ask if she might have the school, she thought.

The villagers were standing at their doors or sitting on the doorsteps to chat, and they narrowly watched her up the street. She knew of what they gossiped, but her resentment had fled, and indeed she scarcely noticed them. Her soul was satisfied with her new-found resignation, and she felt at peace. But as she passed the cottage an unexpected sound arrested her attention. Within the desolate walls a child was crying. She went quickly through the hatch beneath the lilac-bush, and tried the weather-beaten door. It yielded to her push, and in the chimney seat of what had once been the Sandboys' kitchen sat Tamsin, rocking her hungry child to and fro.

"Tamsin, you shall come with me."

"I couldn't," she answered feebly, turning towards the wall.

"You must."

Thus Tamsin came back to the square house.

Mrs. Carew stepped out upon the causeway and watched them pass up the garden path.

A POSTSCRIPT

MORE than three score years have passed, and things have changed ; but not greatly so in Sutton.

The white house stands at the corner of the road, and Marion Burt is still alive. She walks sometimes in summer on the garden path. For the heart cannot die of love. And she has long lived happy—happy in the love of all and in a quiet life.

And Tamsin long outlived her shame, to smile in soft contentment when her daughter's boys played hick-stone on the causeway-flags before the cottage door.

But she is gone this twenty years ago.

And all the rest are gone—gone like the phantoms that we are.

Abraham has said his last "Amen."

Josiah's son lives at the Manor Farm. He learnt his letters after Marion kept the school. One summer afternoon the children were dismissed and he was standing on the stool when Mr. Percival came through the drang. And when she heard the step she let him go, for Mr. Percival was

leaving Sutton for a town, and the boy's disgrace, she said, would be a sad "good-bye." In the field beyond the lane was Abraham calling to his cows.

"I do not know what I shall do when you are gone," she said quite earnestly, and with deep regret.

He looked at her strangely as if the feeling which her words conveyed encouraged a response.

"Marion," he said, taking both her hands in his, "if you will——"

But no, she could not marry him, and so, as a sacred confidence, let the words remain unwritten. After leaving Sutton he wrote many times, and then at last she heard no more. All the parish knew that Mr. Percival wanted Marion Burt. But she would never marry. For girlhood was a dream—and an awakening — and then to dream again another thing.

Yet still she dreams about the man she loved—to-night, as silver-haired she sits beside the bedroom window waiting for the sunset to sink behind the moor.

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